

Every Christian A Publisher

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THE NEED FOR TRUTH

I would like to speak to you today about the importance of the use of literature in the church, for evangelism, for instruction in Christian truth, for devotion, and for its role in planting churches.

Protestants, in particular, are very weak in the proper use of literature to spread God's truth. We still do not remember the words of Daniel Webster who said:

'If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and His Word are not known and received, the devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will; if the power of the Gospel is not felt throughout the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degradation and misery, corruption and darkness, will reign without mitigation or end.'

In Isaiah 1:3, we read, 'Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' Then, chapter after chapter in that prophecy we have a terrible picture of the life and practice of a people who were the professed people of God. Surely their sin and wickedness was the result of not 'knowing,' and they did not know because they did not consider.

Books are to be used to dispel darkness and ignorance. If men do not know, then they must acquaint themselves with facts by reading and studying. We need to use books to fight ignorance—the ignorance of Christian truth and doctrine that is so prevalent in our churches today.

It is appalling to meet people who have been communicant church members for years and who cannot find a place in the Bible, who do not have even a vague idea of the great doctrines of the Bible, and who cannot attach any true meaning to such basic terms as justification, sanctification, regeneration, election and predestination.

Have we forgotten that Christianity is primarily a religion of facts—historical facts? The Bible is a body of divine information; and to be ignorant of the information is to be ignorant of Christianity and to be ignorant of God.

Surely one of the reasons for the deadness and weakness of our churches is ignorance. We will not have churches that are strong and fruitful in experience until we have Christians who are strong in biblical doctrine. Christian experience is nothing less than truth and its evidence revealed and applied by the Spirit to our minds, to our affections and to our wills. Those who 'do not the truth' are those 'in darkness' (1 John 1:6).

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

The ministry of books can be used to evangelize, teach, train and expel ignorance as it has done in the past. A cursory glance at history should convince us that God has used books and literature to enlighten blinded peoples and nations.

How was it that in places where the voices of Luther and Calvin were never heard, their doctrines were embraced, and many of the countries of Europe threw off the yoke of Rome and turned Protestant? It was because books and tracts became, in the hands of God, a mighty reforming and regenerating power.

In reference to the printing press, Sir Thomas More, defender of the Roman Church, complained bitterly that the Reformers had become its master: 'These diabolical people print their books at great expense, notwithstanding the great danger; not looking for any gain, they give them away to everybody, and even scatter them abroad by night.' 'The Pope,' rejoiced John Foxe, (the martyrologist), 'must abolish printing or he must seek a new world to reign over; for by this printing the doctrine of the Gospel soundeth to all nations and countries under heaven.' Thus was the power of the printed page acknowledged.

A book by Richard Sibbes, one of the choicest of the Puritan writers, was read by Richard Baxter, who was greatly blessed by it. Baxter then wrote his *Call To The Unconverted* which deeply influenced Philip Doddridge, who in turn wrote *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This brought the young William Wilberforce, subsequent English statesman and foe of slavery, to serious thoughts of eternity.

Wilberforce wrote his *Practical Book of Christianity* which fired the soul of Leigh Richmond. Richmond, in turn, wrote *The Dairyman's Daughter*, a book that brought thousands to the Lord, helping Thomas Chalmers the great preacher, among others.

What an eye-opener it was for me to read that the Watch Tower building in New York City puts out 12,000,000 pieces of Jehovah Witness literature a month, fifty percent of which is shipped overseas. They have large threestory buildings in which they do nothing but turn out their doctrines and heresies. They use one carload of paper per day and have the world's largest religious bindery in which it is said that they are able to turn out 30,000 books per day. Still more disturbing is the fact that young men and women, between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, give their lives to this cause, with no remuneration apart from their lodging and food. Oh, that the day would come when more young men and women would give their lives to the cause of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ with such dedication as this!

The Russians, a few years ago, published 29,301,400 books in 701 titles. An even greater volume was produced by 700 Communist publishers in 58 countries. Yet at that time the Communists were aiming at a 300% increase in the circulation of the printed page.

In the past the pen has been the hammer to break the errors of centuries. But now the enemies of the truth have learned the value of books and with word processors and printing presses they have left those who love the biblical Christianity far behind.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

You may say you are convinced that books have been, and can be, used to evangelize, to teach, and to train, but, you ask, 'How do I do it?' Here are a few suggestions:

A minister can lead his people to see the importance of the use of good literature just as he leads them in other truths.

I know a minister who led his people to give good books with their Christmas gifts, wedding presents, hospital visits, and to their friends and neighbours. Believe me, it will help you build a strong church.

I know a minister who went to a church and there was not one copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* in any home, in fact, when he first mentioned Bunyan many in his congregation thought he meant Paul Bunyan, the fellow who chopped down trees! Well, in three years there was a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* in 90% of the homes and many had read it.

I know a case where a church introduced a little book table. A lawyer's wife took charge of it and in one year sold \$10,000 worth of Christian books (wholesale).

I know a church where they sell \$1,000 worth of books at Christmas time to be used with gifts—mostly for evangelistic purposes. And in every case this ministry can be traced to the pulpit where a minister caught the vision and had a burden to use this means to evangelize and build up Christians.

Charles H. Spurgeon tells how, when he was a child, his mother would often read a piece of Alleine's *Alarm To The Unconverted* to the family as they sat round the fire on a Sunday evening and, when brought under conviction of sin, it was to this old book that he turned.

'I remember,' he writes, 'when I used to awake in the morning, the first thing I took up was Alleine's *Alarm*, or Baxter's *Call To The Unconverted*. Oh those books, those books! I read and devoured them...'

BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

I want to mention one book specially today that has been mightily used in the history of Christianity, that is my favourite book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Without doubt, next to the Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress has been used to bless more people than any other single book, and you should not rest until every family in your church has a copy. Use it in your sermons!*

William Chalmers Burns, the first Presbyterian missionary to go to China, translated Pilgrim's Progress as a means of evangelizing—a different kind of evangelism than we have today. Later, when he worked farther back into the interior of that nation, he translated it into the local dialects.

I want to tell you a few facts about this immortal volume, *Pilgrim's Progress*, hoping to make you anxious to read it—yes, and study it, and have some family discussions about it.

(1) It has some excellent preaching material. Spurgeon read it one hundred times, and it permeated his sermons.

(2) *Pilgrim's Progress* is the biblical message of salvation by grace.

(3) It is pregnant with Bible truth. Spurgeon said, 'You can prick John Bunyan anywhere for all his blood is "bibline."'

(4) It is not fiction—it bathes and swims in Scripture. The more you know the Bible and the theology of the Bible the better you will understand and appreciate this useful volume.

(5) It is the life of the Christian travelling between two worlds. Hear it in Bunyan's words:

'And thus it was I, writing of the Way And the race of saints in this our gospel day, Fell suddenly into an allegory About their journey, and the way to Glory.'

(6) It is the great doctrines of the Bible, set forth in an experimental and illustrative manner.

(7) It is as relevant today as the day it was written (between 1675 and 1684).

Like the Bible, it is always relevant because it is about God—Man—Sin—Christ—Salvation—Life—Death—Heaven and Hell.

The poet Browning said, 'Tis my belief that God spake; no tinker has such power.'

James Montgomery said, 'God gave a great gift to His church when He converted John Bunyan to write *Pilgrim's Progress*.'

No amount of literary study in itself could ever produce *Pilgrim's Progress*. It took not only the natural gifts and graces of John Bunyan, but also his deep spiritual experiences and insights into the Word of God, and a biblical interpretation of those experiences. Bunyan travelled so close to the Master's steps that he gives a marvellously accurate picture of the road to the Celestial City and of the difficulties we shall find on the way.

Today *Pilgrim's Progress* stands next to the Bible in sales and translations (198 languages). There are indeed so many editions that it is virtually impossible to compute them. There are 50 editions in Africa alone.

Where the Bible goes, we may say, *The Pilgrim's Progress* will follow!

Bunyan and his book have no appeal, at first, to the men and women of this world as I have often noticed. The men and women who are too wrapped up in this world either do not understand it, or see no great depth of spiritual truth in it. Others do not care for it. I recall the words of one, a professional man who had to stop reading it because, as he told me, 'It upsets me too much—spiritually and emotionally.' I am afraid he saw himself too plainly!

Pilgrim's Progress is better than any book on anthropology or psychology. Why do I say that? Because most books on these subjects study man without God or the Bible. Now, you can learn a lot about man without God or the Bible, but you can never get to his *real* problems, and therefore you cannot come up with the correct answers. Bunyan will give you a real insight into yourself and all other sinners as no other book but the Bible.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

Vanity-Fair has not changed. There is a Vanity-Fair every day. *Madam Bubble* still seeks to draw away pilgrims. *Madam Wanton* walks on every street. *Mrs Bats-Eye* still thinks everyone is blind. Men with muckrakes are all around us who will not give up their muckrake for the crown offered by the One above. They will not turn their eyes upward. Are there any of you here today who are so busy with straws, small sticks and dust on the floor, that you have not looked up? Is all your time and energy spent without looking up?

The Church is full of *Talkatives*, the son of *Say-Well* of *Prating Row*. Does this not tell you volumes about this type in just a sentence? Ready at a moment's notice for what you will, this man can, with equal facility and equal emptiness, 'talk of things heavenly or things earthly; things moral or things evangelical; things sacred or things profane; things past or things to come; things foreign or things at home; and the only condition that the wretched windbag stipulates is that all be done to spiritual profit.'

Surely you have met *By-Ends* of *Fair-Speech*. 'A subtle knave' whose grandfather was a waterman, looking one way and rowing another and whose distinguishing characteristics are that, in religion, he makes it a point to 'never to go against wind and tide, and to be the best friend of religion when she goes in silver slippers, walking in the sunshine and is applauded of the people.'

What infinite skill Bunyan had to draw such a character picture in just a few sentences!

Who has not been the prisoner of *Giant Despair* and suffered in *Doubting Castle*, and then experienced that wonderful release by the *Key of Promise*? A beautiful picture and very relevant. Christians and their problems do not change with the calendar. Despair, doubt, fear, and death are still with us.

I hope you have been to *Interpreter's House* where you see things rare, things profitable, things pleasant, and awesome things to make one stable.

Real lessons can be learned about receiving people into the church at *Palace Beautiful* from that grave and beautiful damsel named *Discretion*.

A PRACTICAL LESSON

All of us need to be cheered by the help of *Great-Heart*, *Stand-Fast*, and *Valiant-for-the-truth*, and good old *Honest*. Some of us have been in *Doubting Castle*. Some in *The Slough of Despond*. Some have experienced the temptations at *Vanity-Fair*. All of us have to climb *The Hill Difficulty*, all of us need to be instructed by the Interpreter in *The House Beautiful*. All of us bear the same burdens. All of us need the same armour in our fight with *Apollyon*. All of us have to pass through *The Wicket-Gate*. All of us must pass through *The Dark River*. And for all true Christians there awaits *The Shining Ones* at the gates of *The Celestial City*, 'which, when we see, we wish ourselves amongst them.'

'TWENTY-SIX SOLDIERS'

I hope I have encouraged you to use good sound literature in your ministry. There is power in those twenty-six soldiers—the letters of our alphabet upon the printed page.

Francis Bacon said, 'If I might control the literature of the household, I would guarantee the wellbeing of the church and state.'

Martin Luther said, 'We must throw the printer's inkpot at the devil.'

Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, 'The smallest tract may be the stone in David's sling. In the hands of Christ it may bring down a giant's soul.'

John Trapp said, 'Be careful what books you read, for as water tastes of the soil it runs through, so does the soul taste of the authors that a man reads.'

Samuel Zwemmer said, 'No other agency can penetrate so deeply, witness so daringly, abide so persistently and influence so irresistibly as the printed page.'

The printed page never flinches, it never shows cowardice; it is never tempted to compromise. The printed page never gets tired; it never gets disheartened.

The printed page travels cheaply—you can be a missionary for the price of a stamp. It requires no buildings in which to operate.

The printed page works while you sleep. It never loses its temper in discussion. And it works when you are gone from the scene.

The printed page is a visitor that gets inside the home and stays there. It always catches a man in the right mood, it speaks to him only when he is reading it.

It never answers back and it sticks to the point.

There are some principles in using literature in your ministry that will be helpful:

- (1) Know the books you give to others.
- (2) Know the person, his needs and capacity, to whom you intend to give a book.
- (3) Know the most serious areas of ignorance and the errors of our day. (The doctor does not give green pills to everyone, and he does not give medicine that is not relevant to what he believes to be the problem.)
- (4) Do not be afraid to invest some money in your own missionary project.
- (5) Follow through with other books and with discussion on subjects in the books you use.
- (6) Aim to have a book-table in your church and see that its appearance is varied from week to week.
- (7) Be sure to use books and literature that are consistent with the teaching of the Bible.
- (8) Soak all the books you distribute in fervent prayer.