

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

The Theological Student and the Bible.*

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The Bible is a singular book; it is, in more than one respect, the greatest book in the world, it is, in fact, the only Book of its kind. Its depth of thought the greatest thinkers or philosophers of the world have never been able to fathom, but its essential truths are presented in such simple words that even a child can understand their meaning. From a literary view-point the Bible is unique, both in its original languages and in its translations; it is the best literature that has ever been produced. The chief literary charm of the Bible is the extreme simplicity and the beauty of its language. Our English King James Version was made at the best

* Every Monday evening a brief chapel-talk is given by the Dean to the students of Concordia Seminary at the time of the evening devotions. The one herewith submitted is a sample.

period of English literature. To know the English of the English Bible is to know the beauty and the power of the English language. There is no better model for the study of English than the English of the English Bible. Carlyle, himself a master of English, says of the Book of Job: "I call the Book of Job, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written by pen. There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it of equal literary merit." The Bible is the best story-book that has ever been written. Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with beautiful stories: highly interesting, thrilling, true to life, instructive. Critics say that the story of the Prodigal Son is the best short story ever written. The Bible is the most frequently quoted book in the world. Literature is filled with direct and indirect references to it and quotations from it. Many beautiful references and passages in literature can simply not be understood and appreciated by a man who does not know his Bible. Considered simply from a literary point of view, a man's education is not complete without a knowledge of the Bible.

Grand as the Bible is as a piece of literature, *we*, however, should not merely nor in the first place study it for the sake of its literary value, but because it is *the inspired Word of God*, able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Of all books the Christian ought to know his Bible. It goes without saying that above all men a pastor ought to know the Bible.

When the theological student has been graduated from the seminary, he will find it a task to prepare well one sermon every week, perhaps in many cases two, with the additional number which he must prepare for holidays, special occasions, and funerals. Many a young pastor also teaches the church-school. This work, besides his pastoral duties, will take up so much of his time that he will study chiefly his sermon-texts and will neglect to make a *special study of the Bible as a whole*.

But does not the theological student in the course of his theological curriculum learn to know the Bible as a whole? No, not in the course of his *prescribed* theological curriculum. In the lectures on isagogics he learns to know the Bible as a whole only as far as its general make-up and general contents are concerned, the writers of the various books, the time when the books were written, and so forth. Isagogics is but an introduction to the study of the Bible and not the study of the Bible itself. Exegesis calls for a study of the Bible itself; but in the exegetical lectures only

a number of books or mere portions of books of the Bible are studied exegetically and not the Bible as a whole. The purpose of the exegetical lectures, treating certain important parts of the Bible, is to teach the student how to study the whole Bible and to encourage him to do so. In the lectures on dogmatics the Scripture-passages are studied which prove the great doctrines of the Christian religion and many other Scripture-passages are introduced, but all these are but a small portion of the Bible as a whole. The Scripture-lessons at the chapel services are also only small portions of the Bible selected for devotional purposes. In his prescribed theological curriculum, therefore, the student does not study the whole Bible. If he would learn to know the Bible as a whole, he must learn it by way of *private* Bible study.

My purpose this evening is to encourage you to *study* the Scriptures. It is unnecessary to emphasize that you ought to do this. Take a book of the Bible and read it at one sitting, so that at once you get an idea of the book as a whole. By reading and studying only portions of the books, very often small portions, we do not learn to understand the general trend of thought and the purpose which the book as such is to serve. To begin with, read a number of books in this way. Then for a better understanding read portion after portion, giving special attention to difficult passages. Remember the rule of hermeneutics that the Scripture is the only authentic interpreter of itself, *Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*. For this purpose look up and study the references given in the margin of your Bible. Only in the last instance resort to one or more of the many commentaries that have been written on the Bible. Set aside a certain time each day or a certain time of certain days for private Bible study. You will do well to mark certain portions of your reading, make notes, and keep a list of beautiful Scripture-passages which you can later use as sermon-texts or by way of application in your sermons, or when calling on the sick, the erring, or the stranger without the gates.

Making a thorough study of the Bible will serve a threefold purpose: First, it will strengthen your spiritual life, add to your happiness, and increase your usefulness as an individual Christian in this world; secondly, it will be helpful to you in your sermon work, — many pastors often complain that they with difficulty find suitable texts for their evening service or for special occasions, the reason being that they do not know their Bible; thirdly, a thorough knowledge of the Bible will make you better able as a pastor,

a shepherd of souls, to supply the spiritual needs of the many different kinds of people whom you will meet in your congregation and in your mission-work.

Ceterum censeo, Search the Scriptures. Of all books which you read and know let the Bible be the book with which you are thoroughly acquainted from cover to cover. Don't make the mistake of reading many books about the Bible without making a thorough study of the Bible itself. May it be said of you that you "*know* the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," remembering that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. 3, 16. 17.
