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Churches of Christ Salute You with a Herald of Truth: The Influence of the Bible

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The Influence of the Bible

By James D. Willeford

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Once a little boy sat with his sister during the worship service. After the evangelist finished his sermon, the little boy asked, "Is it all done now?" And the sister replied, "No, it has just been said. Now we must go out and do it." The truth expressed by this little girl is found on every page of the New Testament. Jesus asked, "why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46.) When the Bible is translated into action, it has a far-reaching influence for good. That influence has been demonstrated through the centuries.

It is as impossible to determine the full influence of the Bible on world civilization as it would be to go to the mouth of the Mississippi River and follow up the stream till we had ferreted out each tributary and discovered the exact source from whence each drop of water had come. But we can see much of the Bible's influence in every sphere of our life.

One fruit of the Bible is its elevation of the human being. Where it is not well known, as in China, India, Russia, and Japan, a human being is the cheapest commodity. Human life is not counted for much, and an ox is prized more highly than a man. Jesus was the first great teacher of men who showed a genuine sympathy for childhood. When he said, "Of such is the Kingdom of heaven," it was a revelation. Plato, Aristotle, and Seneca approved the killing of deformed or sickly children. (*History of the Christian Church*, by Philip Schaff, Vol. II, p. 360.) But Christ put a definite value upon child-life by his attitude toward children. He was never too busy to take them into His arms and bless them.

Another influence of the Bible has been the abolishment of slavery. "The Roman nation with a population of about one hundred and twenty-five million held more than sixty million people in the basest sort of slavery." (*Why We Believe the Bible*, by George W. De Hoff, p. 65.) Philip Schaff, a reliable church historian, says, "Heathenism had no conception of the general and natural rights of men. The ancient republics consisted in the exclusive dominion of a minority over an oppressed majority. . . The barbarians were taken in thousands . . . and sold as cheap as horses." (*History of the Christian Church*, Volume II, p. 350.) The slaves were overworked, underfed and killed at the pleasure of their owners. All this was done with the approval of the pagan priests and philosophers. Aristotle said slavery is "natural and indispensable." Cato advised that slaves be worked to death rather than let them grow old and unprofitable. (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, pp. 348, 350.) Yet from the outset Christianity has labored for the end of slavery "not by impairing the right of property, not by outward violence, nor sudden revolution. . . but by its moral power, by preaching the . . . unity

Page 2

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE

Page 3

of all men, their common redemption through Christ, the duty of brotherly love, and the true freedom of the spirit." (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, p. 348.) From the very beginning, slaves were received into churches of Christ on the same basis as their masters. Where Christianity has gone, slavery has either retreated or been destroyed. Even Thomas Huxley, the unbeliever, had to admit that "The Bible has been the Magna Charta of the poor and oppressed." (*3000 Illustrations for Christian Service*, by Walter B. Knight, p. 42.)

The influence of the Bible has also changed the position of women. Excluding the Hebrews, the women of all nations in ancient times were expected to assume the most degraded position. We are told that in very early Rome, a man might put his wife to death without so much as a trial. Also the Greeks honored the women who followed the most abject passions. But the Hebrews honored their wives and sisters for their purity. Only in the lands where the influence of the Bible has gone is woman taken from under the feet of man and placed at his side as a help suitable to him that they together might do the work that has been allotted them by the Heavenly Father.

Another great influence of the Bible has been its moral teaching. When Christianity was born, the world was morally corrupt. Even the pagan religions were but empty forms, catering to the basest forms of immorality and vice. Men neither feared nor revered their gods.

Gladiatorial combats were held, in which thousands were sometimes killed, just to amuse the spectators. Historians testify that most of these abuses were abolished as Christianity spread over the Roman Empire. The Bible has demonstrated its influence through changing the lives of ungodly men. "Did you ever hear a man say, 'I used to steal, lie, drink, swindle, abuse my family, gamble, break up homes, beat my debts and was an immoral citizen, but I was finally induced to read some books on infidelity, atheism, and doubt, and now I go to church, treat my family decently, pay my debts, live a moral life, try to be a good neighbor, and a good citizen as the result of the influence these books had on me?' No, you never will for the Bible is the only book that has such an influence on men." (*The Bible—It's Origin*, by Robt. W. Lawrence, p. 5.)

An outstanding fruit borne by the Bible has been its influence upon marriage. In a special news item the *Dallas News* of Dallas, Texas, recently reported that an outstanding record in marriage relationships has been set by students of a certain college in that state in which the Bible is taught. Out of approximately three thousand marriages begun on the campus, there have been only five divorces, or a rate of one out of every six hundred. The editorialist of the *Dallas News* said, "Such a figure is very startling when compared with the national average of one marriage in every four ending in divorce." This is indicative of the good influence of the Bible when it is read and obeyed.

The Bible exerts a mighty influence in the home. The Social Security Agency of our government has said, "The child who has had the advantages of living in a home with a religious background—that type of religion which is practiced as well as preached and which teaches the individual to think in terms of others than himself—finds that something very fundamental and important has been woven into the moral fabric of his personality. Religion helps to give to the boy or girl that sense of security and worthwhileness about life both present and future that the maturing individual needs." (Guiding the Adolescent, Social Security Agency, U. S. Children's Bureau, Pub. No. 225, p. 83, Revised 1946, Washington, D. C.) Our own FBI pleads for Christian homes where the Bible is taught. Our judges all testify that very few young people who have been taught the Bible consistently are ever brought before them for misdemeanors.

No man can measure fully the influence of the Bible upon our country. Herbert Hoover said, "As a nation we are indebted to the Book of books for our national ideas and representative institutions. Their preservation rests in adhering to its principles." (3000 Illustrations for Christian Service, by Walter B. Knight, p. 53.) Daniel Webster said, "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible our country will go on prospering and to prosper, but if we and our posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury our glory in profound obscurity." (Ibid., p. 43.) On his deathbed, Andrew Jackson said, "That Book is the rock on which our republic rests." Friends, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence—even the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms are built upon the principles set forth in the Bible.

If you want to test the influence of the Bible upon nations, just contrast the lands where the Bible is read and respected with the lands where it is suppressed or banned. It does not take a wise man to see the difference between the progress made in such nations as the United States, Canada, England, Denmark and the backwardness of nations like Spain, Mexico, and the countries of South America. In these latter countries the Bible does not have free course among the common people, and the nations are reaping the consequences.

Where the Bible goes civilization follows. This fact may be illustrated by the story of a converted African cannibal who sat reading his Bible when a European trader passed by and asked him what he was doing. "Reading the Bible," was the reply. "That Book is out of date in my country," said the trader. "If it had been out of date here," said the African, "you would have been eaten long ago." (3000 Illustrations for Christian Service, p. 51.)

The influence of the Bible is strongly felt in the educational realm also. Sir Isaac Newton said, "I count the scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy." In Europe between 1550 and 1700 twenty great universities were founded all by religious people, who believed in and accepted the Bible. In America almost all of our great universities were endowed and built by religious men. Harvard was founded by the Puritans,

and its first benefactor, John Harvard, was a preacher. James Blair, another preacher, was active in the founding of William and Mary College. We could repeat this story many times in giving the history of our great schools if time permitted. Skeptics and infidels have charged Christians with trying to "Bootleg" the Bible into our schools, colleges and universities. Bootleg indeed! Christianity and the influence imparted by the Bible has founded almost all of these schools. Men, who believe the Bible, endowed and built these institutions of learning in our land. But how many colleges and universities have been built by atheists? If the skeptics want to teach their various brands of infidelity, let them build their own schools and stop "bootlegging" their doctrines into the public schools of our nation.

The influence of the Bible in the field of education is readily recognized. In nations where it is not only freely taught but individuals are urged and encouraged to read it regularly the illiteracy rate is much lower. The following figures will serve as examples. In Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico from fifty-four to eighty-two percent of the people cannot read or write. In Spain fifty-eight per cent are illiterate; in Portugal, sixty-eight per cent, and in Italy seventy per cent. (Figures from *The American Protest*, New York, April, 1953.) Now let us take a look at the countries where the Bible is freely read by anyone who desires to read it. In the United States seven per cent of the people cannot read or write. In Canada eleven per cent are illiterate. In Australia the figure is less than two per cent; in Holland eight-tenths of one per cent; in England, 1.8; in Denmark, .2; in Scotland 1.6; and in Sweden, .2. We truly believe that the same spirit which leads nations to want their citizenry to know more about the Bible will also cause them to provide facilities for their education that they may be able to learn more about it.

A further indication of the Bible's influence is the fact that manual labor has always been esteemed and highly regarded in Bible lands. The Bible and its influence have given a dignity to labor which it never enjoyed before. Plato and Aristotle taught that labor was degrading. The Emperor Augustus once executed a senator for working in a garden to help a friend. In the Old Testament times every man was encouraged to learn a trade. David was a shepherd boy; Amos, a farmer; Christ, a carpenter; some of the apostles, fishermen; and Paul was a tent-maker. It is a direct influence of the Bible which has permitted laborers to gain their position and has given us cooperation instead of exploitation.

The Bible also manifests its influence in our literature. That influence affords a dramatic illustration of the sway of the Bible in our civilization.

The Bible is the 'source book' of all good literature for all good books or good writings are only the Bible in dilution. If you were to remove everything from our books which came from the Bible you would delete the bulk of Shakespeare and Milton; spoil the style of Addison; the pathos of Dickens; remove the charm of Longfellow; render worthless the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the

Atlantic Charter; remove mercy from all of the laws; the songs from most of the poems and banish all hymns out of existence. You would completely destroy one third of all books, and render another third useless.

Once an atheist sent a parcel of infidel literature to a young man, advising him to read it in preference to the Bible. The young man replied: "Dear Sir: If you have anything better than the Sermon on the Mount, more beautiful than the story of the prodigal son or the Good Samaritan; or any code of morals higher than the Ten Commandments or the 'Golden Rule' of Jesus Christ; or more consoling and beautiful than the Twenty-third Psalm; or anything that will reveal to me a more loving and merciful God, or will throw more light on the future—send it along." (3000 Illustrations for Christian Service, p. 68.) What other book has had such influence?

The final test of any work is its fruit. Jesus said, "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." (Matt. 7:18.) The fruit speaks either for or against the tree. We are willing to test the Bible solely by its fruits. Upon this one point we are willing to rest our case that the Bible is inspired of God and is not the writings of unaided men.

There is not a person listening to me—not even a skeptic or an atheist—who would be willing to move his family into a land where the influence of the Bible has not been felt. Surely such a Book deserves your careful investigation.

A comparison of the fruits of the Bible with the fruits of infidelity will at once convince any thinking man of the superiority of God's word. Infidelity has never built a hospital or an orphan home; it has never explored a new country or carried the light to those who sit in darkness. It never has reached down into the clutches of sin and vice to take hold of a wretched soul and lift it up to higher planes, and save it at last from sin and death.

The Bible has transformed both men and nations. Its influence was powerful enough to change a murderer like Saul of Tarsus. He had been persecuting Christians, but when the word of God was planted in his heart he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus instructed him to go into the city of Damascus and it would be told him what he must do. After he went into the city Christ sent Ananias to tell Saul to "arise, and be baptized, and wash away sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16.) The Word of God had such an influence upon Saul that he believed it, repented of his sins, and was baptized into Christ. From that day forth, he lived and breathed the message of the gospel. When he came to the end of life's way, he was able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (II Tim. 4:7,8.) The gospel can have the same influence in your life that it had in Saul's if you will receive its message of redeeming love.