

# **TRUE METHOD OF SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES**

## **SUGGESTIVE THOUGHTS**

In the brief race of life, we all start from the same point. We enter the world unconscious of our origin, of our very existence, and of the objects which surround us; and profoundly ignorant of the dark and dreary future, which spreads out before us. We differ through life in our information, in the part we play in life's drama; and we shall finally differ in the world to come; yet all our differences, to a greater or less extent, depend upon our own exertions. The wisest and best of men become so by continual labor; while the corrupt and degraded reap only the reward of their own wicked lives. In our jail and penitentiary reports, we see clearly that crime most abounds in the hands of ignorance; and while we must admit that the drunken, profane, and vile of all climes, from their mistakes in the objects of life, bring upon themselves their deepest misery, we are led to ask ourselves the profound question, Why do mortals of earth sin against God, their Creator and kind Preserver? Solomon has answered the question: "The way of the wicked," said he, "is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." "Darkness,"

indeed, “has covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.” “The blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch together.”

No one can walk in the light who has it not; and if correct moral conduct, spiritual progress, and eternal life at the end of our earthly journey depend in the least upon the quality and amount of our moral light, the study of life should be to gain true knowledge. It is a singular truth that men often become quite wise in the affairs of this world who, nevertheless, remain children in the things that pertain to God; and it is still more strange that there are large funds of false wisdom which close the mind and heart of the true fountain which is able to enlighten every man that comes into the world. The question, “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?” is not more appropriate than to ask, “What shall it profit us, though we acquire all the knowledge *the world* can furnish, and yet fail to gain ‘The true light’ which comes from above, and which alone can give assurance of ‘That rest which remains for the people of God.’”

# I.

## THE TRUE ORIGIN OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, AND OUR DUTIES TO HIM

Inasmuch as men, for nearly six thousand years, have become virtuous and happy in the exact ratio of their knowledge of their Creator and his will concerning them, it is a question of very deep interest to ascertain the proper mode of acquiring this inestimable information. There are three ways in which it is supposed this knowledge is gained; yet, there can be but one correct source of Divine wisdom. These demand a brief yet careful examination at our hands.

FIRST. *It is supposed that Nature affords full information concerning our Father who is in heaven.*

The word Nature is employed; first, to denote the outward world—the heavens with their starry hosts, and the earth, with her ten thousand tongues; and, secondly, it is used to express the supposed world of spontaneous light within—that which is imagined to be natural to the soul.

Wise men, in the different ages of the world, and even christian philosophers, have maintained that the study of external nature not only affords correct knowledge with regard to the invisible God, but also furnishes all needful information relative to our duties to our Creator and to each other. It would be proper to state, in reply, that nature is not a bridge from the visible to the invisible world. The dull matter of the heavens and the earth, with their whole machinery, is insufficient to *suggest* either the existence or perfections of that God who is Spirit. The leap from the visible to the invisible is not only too great for the philosophy of man, but it is also far above the loftiest imagination. A few plain reasons will justify these conclusions.

When man was first created, his Father and his God, though invisible to us, spoke to him face to face; and it is unreasonable to suppose that his posterity could entirely lose such information. We, moreover, have heard of no nation acknowledging God, whose information cannot be traced to direct communications, which are as high above nature as God is above man.

Were we to admit that nature reveals spiritual light, we would be compelled to maintain the sufficiency of this light to guide us in the path of life.

But facts contradict such a conclusion. They show that those who have been without the Bible, though wise in the things of the world, have known but little of God

or his ways, and this little can be clearly traced to a source different from nature.

When we look into the Scriptures, we find the whole theory contradicted. We are told, "The world by wisdom," philosophy, or the study of nature, "knew not God." "It pleased God, by the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."

To the enlightened, we rejoice to believe that the heavens and the earth beautifully "declare," impress and confirm, "the glory of God;" but as previously urged, they have no voice to *tell* of the unseen hand which launched them forth.

Those who plead for the inborn light of the soul to reveal the person and power of our Heavenly Father, must, to be consistent, also maintain the competency of this light, "To lighten every man that comes into the world." Many do so, and further assert in the style of an old philosopher that, "This soul of ours, is the divinity within," and is able to guide us into all truth.

Some go even further than this; and tell us, that the soul is either God, or a part of God, and its immortality is its own natural "outgrowth." This theory may seem pretty; but it is not only deceptive, but most dangerous. When we place our highest knowledge in human nature, and declare that eternal happiness is the legitimate and necessary offspring of the soul, we deny that this wisdom comes through the Bible; and much worse, we virtually

say that redemption is not by Christ and that he did not really “Bring life and immortality to light in the Gospel.” To such, there is no meaning in the death of Christ, and the Bible is worse than a useless book. Indeed, we are sorry to admit that most, if not all this class of teachers, deny that the Scriptures really *reveal* anything. It is not uncharitable to pronounce them a sect of deceitful and dangerous speculators.

This pernicious system is now prevailing in Germany, under the head of “Transcendentalism,” and wherever it gains footing, God’s blessed word is crushed before it.

In France, it speaks out in what is denominated “Social Philosophy.” It rejects, everywhere, the authority of the “Written oracles,” and calls these pranks before high Heaven, “struggles for liberty;” and even conceals the deadly poison beneath by throwing over it the mantle of “Charity.”

But more need not be said to give the young or old reader, disposed to think and draw conclusions, a pretty comprehensive idea of the system which claims Nature as a sufficient rule in morality and spirituality.

SECOND. *Many zealous religionists maintain that all the light from the unseen world comes in direct revelation of the spirit to each individual.*

Quakers, Shakers, and Mormons, with equal zeal and apparent sincerity, flood the world with their contradicto-

ry revelations of the spirit, and to doubt their truth is, in their estimation, to doubt all spiritual religion.

Spiritual Knockers, tell us that they receive their information from the invisible world through the ghosts of the departed dead, and a single doubt as to the verity of these new dreams is pronounced illiberality and uncharitableness; and those who dare do so are charged with the sin of “opposition to all progress.”

The thousands of “seekers of religion” or revelations of forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God in the divers altars, at the mourner’s bench, anxious seat, or in the silent grove, profess to receive direct revelations and witnesses of the spirit in impulses, feelings, still small voices, and various other ways, too tedious and revolting to mention. Those who hesitate to admit the truth of these revival revelations subject themselves to the severe charge of denying all spiritual light and holy influence.

All of these either receive the direct revelations of the spirit or they do not. They get positive light or they get nothing. There is no compromise in the matter. Those who profess to receive light in these ways either experience what they profess or they are mistaken in their conclusions and are bewildered in their whole religion.

It might be well to take a bird’s-eye view, of the works of these singular systems of Spiritualism.

Is it not a startling truth that persons inclined to such influence much prefer their direct revelations, perhaps while asleep or in answer to their prayers, to the written declarations of the Bible? How could it be otherwise? Who, that could obtain fresh revelations, would be satisfied to labor and toil for the knowledge of God in the Bible? Indeed, we may justly conclude, as we were compelled to do in reference to the insufficiency of Nature to reveal the unseen, that when we admit direct and perpetual revelations of the spirit, there is no place or work left on earth for the precious Bible. Thus, direct Spiritualism banishes the sacred Scriptures from the world and leaves nothing in their place.

The effect of these things is most injurious. Those under their influence are by no means in a condition to read, hear, or believe the word of God. They are directed by feelings, which they tell us, “make them happy,” and they desire nothing beyond. If this were the condition of the ignorant slave, we might entertain strong hopes that the intelligence of the times would banish it from our world, but it is seen in high places,—among the learned and influential. It is said, extremes oft meet; and it is somewhat singular that zealous religionists are not the only persons who advocate the revelations of feelings. Many church members mean nothing more by the direct witness of the spirit than a hopeful feeling within that God has accepted them in the Beloved. Some who trust to human nature as a guide profess to walk by a similar inward light of feeling. We are strongly inclined to the opinion that such persons must follow in part, if not altogether, the inclinations



of their own fleshly desires and fickle passions. It is well known that the celebrated infidels, Voltaire and Helvetius, advocated the unlimited gratification of their fleshly appetites. The famous scoffer Rousseau, who, according to his own printed reports, was a thief, a falsifier, and a profligate, had recourse to *feeling* as his standard of morality.

“I have only to consult myself,” said he, “concerning what I do. All I feel to be right, is right; what I feel to be wrong, is wrong. All the morality of our actions lies in the judgment we ourselves form of them. The tendency of the philosophy, learning and religion of the age, is to make an infallible spiritual standard of each one’s passions, desires and feelings. The charitable doctrine in most of the churches is, what each thinks and feels in his own conscience to be right, is right to him.”

Men, of course, who preach this must be popular; such flattery of the flesh could but delight the sensual. These men gravely pronounce opposition to these sentiments, “dogmatism, popery, and tyranny;” and boldly deny that there is a written standard in religion. The Apostle Peter very strikingly describes them thus:

“There are wells without water, clouds that are carried with the tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption.”

But the reader need not be further detained in examination of false revelations and systems which have been of no service to the world.

THIRD. *The best of men, since the establishment of the christian religion, have maintained that the Bible fairly translated into the various languages of earth is the only safe guide in all spiritual investigations.*

On this part of the subject, it will be in place to state clearly the Romanish and Protestant positions.

The Roman Catholic Church, while she has advocated the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, has never admitted that the Bible is a rule of life, adapted to the people. Indeed, she has always maintained that the *naked* Scriptures should not be read by the people.

In this, she is consistent; for she thinks the Bible has divers and diverse meanings which the common people cannot understand. Hence the struggle in the United States to keep the Bible out of schools which Romish children attend.

The Romish position is that the Scriptures must be *interpreted* by the doctors of the church; and these interpretations, with the decrees of the authoritative councils and the *traditions* of the fathers, constitute the only infallible rule in the church.

Protestants deny the decrees of the Romish Church and the traditions; but they suppose the Scriptures are not *in form* a rule of life. The true Protestant position is that it remains for each sect to give authoritative interpretations of the Bible to suit the various ages and circumstances of the people, and yet they say their members have the right of private judgment or individual interpretations; but they are scrupulously careful that these private interpretations of the Bible agree with the higher interpretations of the respective churches. We shall next examine what we most sacredly regard as the Christian position.

We believe and teach that the Heavenly Father gave a perfect code of laws to the Jews, which were adapted to the understanding of the people; and that every effort to interpret them, in a sense which would imply that they could be improved by man, was a gross departure from authority. Hence the Saviour charged the Jews with the sin of rejecting the commandments of God by their traditions.

We believe and teach that the New Testament is a “*perfect law of liberty*,” and that it is, in *matter and form*, sufficient to make all “wise unto salvation” who will follow its teachings.

The most wonderful feature in the New Testament is its perfect adaptation to Christians in all time and in all circumstances of life. The man of deep learning may employ all his days in reading profitably and sacred oracles; and yet, so simple are parts of this “Last will and testa-

ment” of our Lord that, in the language of the prophet, “Though fools, they shall not err therein.”

Each article of faith or item of belief is forcibly and yet more handsomely expressed in the Bible than in any other book on earth. Each duty to God is fully revealed and forcibly written, and all church obligations and injunctions to the world are clearly set forth.

Thus, we are fully prepared to answer the question as to the origin of the knowledge of God and our information in reference to the invisible world.

The Bible is, undoubtedly, the only medium of communication between mortals of earth and God their Maker. This proposition is sustained by the fact that in no country or age has man’s spiritual acquisition transcended the information furnished in the Bible. We are sorry to know that, even in this favored land, it is contended that the Bible without an additional inspiration, is not sufficient for spiritual light. Still they tell us, in the next breath, that “The heathen are perishing for lack of the knowledge which the Bible affords.” Thus it seems, according to these statements, that, while the Scriptures to be efficacious at home, must be accompanied by other and higher revelations of the spirit; in less favored lands, and such as have no Bibles, there is no spiritual light. Man is often inconsistent in his ways. Take from us the precious oracles of God and the sun of the moral world will be blotted out; and man, with all his boasted attainments, will, in a few generations, fall into ignorance and a life of

barbarism. *Good* and *evil*, where the Bible is not, are words without meaning.

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by Tolbert Fanning

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