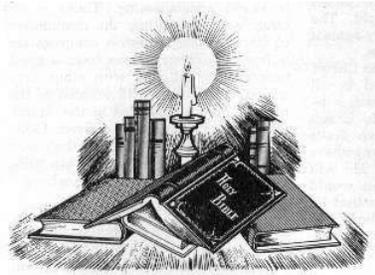


# The Bible



Ira J. Amburgey

Do you have a BIBLE in your home? Do you ever read it? I'm not being facetious; I'm serious. I find Bibles everywhere I go, in all sorts of homes, and I like that. Year after year, I have read that the Bible is still the best seller of all books. However, my joy is tempered a little when I hear some people say that the Bible is the best sold and least read of all books, but I am still glad the Old Book is being distributed to such a wide audience.

What disturbs me most is the constant evidence that our children, generally speaking, are not as well acquainted with the Bible as they are with Mickey Mouse and Little Red Riding Hood. That is not their fault; it is ours. It is supposed to be funny to hear the children display their ignorance of the Book of books—like the little girl who said that Alice in Wonderland was her favorite Bible story or the boy who answered the question in a quiz, "What are the Epistles?" by saying that the Epistles were the wives of the Apostles. That is not funny; it is tragic.

I think it is high time we really got to work on Bible reading and discussion in the home for several reasons. One reason is that we would not have the kind of homes we have in America without the presence and the influence of the Bible. From Plymouth Rock to Virginia, it was planted by our forefathers as the seed of American democracy and a new way of life on a new continent. Its precepts are written into the Constitution, creeds, and customs of our land. It is good history—good American history. If we want our children to love and appreciate America, we had better show them early in their lives that its greatness and freedom are Bible born.

Do not take my word for it. Ulysses S. Grant said, "The Bible is the sheet anchor of our liberties." Andrew Jackson stated: "That Book, sir, is the rock upon which our republic rests." Patrick

Henry, a rather familiar figure in the fight for American freedom, said, "The Bible is worth more than all the other greatest gift God has ever given to man." George Washington, who knew something about government, held that it was impossible "rightly to govern the world without God and the Bible." Horace Greely thought the Bible was responsible for, "It is impossible to enslave mentally or socially a Bible-reading people. The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom." Do you need more? You'll find such tribute to the Bible on the lips of any great and true American.

Yes, it is good history, and our children should know it. They will be told by some cynics as they grow older that there are mistakes in dates and that historically it was intended to be used as a textbook in history classrooms, but to me it seems better to tell them what Sir Isaac Newton told us: "There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history." Yes, it is good history. It is good education in the study of man's attempt to find God and God's attempt to reach man.

Tennyson said, "Bible reading is an education in itself," and it was William Lyon Phelps who said, "If I had a choice between a college student without a knowledge of the Bible and a young man without the college education but with good knowledge of the Bible, I would pick the latter." It is good history, it is good reading, and there is no writing like it, before or since it was written.

When Pearl Buck wrote her famous *Good Earth*, the finest compliment that was paid to her beautiful writing came from a hard-boiled critic who said, "It reads like the Book of Ruth!" How many of our great books have borrowed plots, titles, and characters from the Bible? The greatest of our artists and writers have read the Book for inspiration. If men were to take the influence of this Book out of art and literature, they would rob art and literature of their greatest works and noblest expressions.

It is good reading as well as good history, and yet, if this were all it was, it would not mean much to me. It was not written to be read as "good literature"; it was written to guide men to God, to lift them from sin and ugly living into abundant life built on the model of the Master.

The Bible, God's Holy Word, is not to be read like other books or a newspaper, or a magazine; too many blessings are lost unless it is read as a personal message from God Himself. That is it! That is the reason we should read it. You would not refuse to read a letter from a friend, would you? If God is your best friend and has something to say to you, then why wouldn't you read it?

The Bible is a text on good, godly living. It is *The Book of Life*, an account of the noblest life ever lived upon

this earth. It is a continued story of the lifting up of man from the days when a brother could kill a brother in cold blood and feel no pangs of conscience to the days when Jesus said, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44), and with that day, with this Jesus, God's love began to rule the hearts of men and His way became the ideal way of life for all men everywhere.

I love this Book, not because it is good history and good reading; I love it because I see it as God's holy broom sweeping clean the hearts of mankind. I have seen it turn liars into truth-tellers, thieves into benefactors, frustrated people into men and women seeking and following the purpose and plan of the Almighty, proud fools into humble saints. I love it because I know it to be the most powerful force in the changing and ennobling of human life that has ever existed anywhere. It has changed me, and that is all the evidence I need as to its power. It works.

Why do we cheat our children of a thorough knowledge of such a mighty Book? Would we refuse a man dying in the desert a cup of water? Do you refuse your child food for his body? Of course not! Then, what about food for his heart, mind, and soul?

There are things in the Bible that I do not understand, but if I waited until I understood all of it, I would never receive good from any of it. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman was asked once if he thought all the Bible of equal value. He replied, "When you eat fish, you don't eat bones and all do you?" Think that over carefully. I "eat" what I can understand, and I enjoy it; I leave what I cannot understand to the God who inspired the Bible. He knows, and I am content to leave it there until He reveals it.

I agree with Mark Twain who said that it was not the part of the Bible he could not understand that bothered him; it was the parts he could understand. I also agree with the man who said, "Men do not reject the bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts them." It contradicts all that is unworthy in my life; it contradicts my greed, my selfishness, my ignoble ambitions. It contradicts the worst in me and encourages the best. It makes me lift my sights to God. It makes a "new creature" of me through its Christ.

A Mohammedan trader in India asked a European friend to get him a "European" Bible. When asked why, when he could not read any European language, he replied, "When a ship brings a European trader to me who is a stranger and who wants to trade with me, I put the Bible in his way and watch him. If he opens it and reads it, I know I can trust him; but if he throws it aside with a sneer or a curse, I will have nothing to do with him, because I know I cannot trust him." Exactly!

A famous translator of the classics, having translated Homer's Odyssey and Iliad, decided to write a new translation of the four Gospels. His son said, "It will be interesting to see what Father makes of the Gospels, but it will be more interesting what the Gospels make of Father!"

No one but God knows what the Bible can make of us—and our children, if we will allow it to work in our lives.

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