

Timothy and the Scriptures

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C H Spurgeon

2 Timothy 3:15

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”—2 Timothy 3:15.

How very remarkable the times repeat themselves! When the same evils come, we must apply to them the same remedies. When a disease appears which has done deadly mischief in past times, physicians inquire for medicines which on a former occasion curbed the enemy. We are bound to do the same in spiritual matters. We must see what Paul did in his day when the malaria of false doctrine was in the air. It is remarkable how very simple as a rule, everything is that is really effective. If a discovery is made in science or machinery, it is complicated at first, and that for the very reason that it is imperfect; but all improvements are in the direction of simplicity. It is just the same with spiritual teachings. When we get at reality we cut off superfluity. Let us not talk of inventing wise measures for the present distress in the spiritual world, but let us use the great remedy which was so effectual in Paul's day. Paul taught young Timothy the gospel himself: he made him not only hear his doctrine, but see his practice. We cannot force truth upon men, but we can make our own teaching clear and decided, and make our lives consistent therewith. Truth and holiness are the surest antidotes to error and unrighteousness. The apostle said to Timothy, “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.”

He then dwelt upon another potent remedy which had been of great service to the young preacher, namely, the knowing of the holy scriptures from his earliest childhood. This was to young Timothy one of his best safeguards. His early training held him like an anchor, and saved him from the dreadful drift of the age. Happy young man, of whom the apostle could say, “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”!

To be prepared for the coming conflict, we have only to preach the Gospel, and to live the Gospel; and also to take care that we teach the children the Word of the Lord. This last is especially to be attended to, for it is by the mouth of babes and sucklings that God will still the enemy. Keep to the apostolic plans, and rest assured of apostolic success. Preach Christ; preach the Word in season and out of season; and teach the children. One of God's chief methods for preserving his fields from tares, is to sow them early with wheat.

The work of God's grace in Timothy COMMENCED WITH EARLY INSTRUCTION—“From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures.”

Note the time for instruction. The expression, “from a child,” might be better understood if we read it, “from a very child”; or, as the Revised Version has it, “from a babe.” It does not mean a well-grown child, or youth, but a child just rising out of infancy. From a very child Timothy had known the sacred writings. This expression is, no doubt, used to show that we cannot begin too early to imbue the minds of our children with scriptural knowledge. Babes receive impressions long before we are aware of the fact. During the first months of a child's life it learns more than we imagine. It soon learns the love of its mother, and its own dependence; and if the mother be wise, it learns the meaning of obedience and the necessity of yielding its will to a higher will. This may be the keynote of its whole future life.

The holy scripture may be learned by children as soon as they are capable of understanding anything. It is a very remarkable fact, which I have heard asserted by many teachers, that children will learn to read out of the Bible better than from any other book. I scarcely know why: it may, perhaps, be on account of the simplicity of the language; but I believe it is so. A Biblical fact will often be grasped when an incident of common history is forgotten. There is an adaptation in the Bible for human beings of all ages, and therefore it has a fitness for children. We make a mistake when we think that we must begin with something else and lead up to the Scriptures. The Bible is the book for the peep of day. Parts of it are above a child's mind, for they are above the comprehension of the most advanced among us. There are depths in it wherein leviathan may swim; but there are also brooks in which a lamb may wade. Wise teachers know how to lead their little ones into the green pastures beside the still waters.

I was noticing, in the life of that man of God whose loss presses very heavily upon many of our hearts, namely, the Earl of Shaftesbury, that his first religious impressions were produced by a humble woman. The impressions which made him Shaftesbury—the man of God, and the friend of man—were received in the nursery. Little Lord Ashley had a godly nurse who spoke to him of the things of God. He tells us that she died before he was seven years of age; clear proof that early in life his heart had been able

to receive the seal of the Spirit of God, and to receive it by humble instrumentality. Blessed among women was she whose name we know not, but who wrought incalculable service for God and man by her holy teaching of the chosen child. Young nurses, note this. Among the thoughts that come to an old man before he enters heaven, the most plentiful are those that aforesaid visited him when he sat upon his mother's knee. That which made Dr. Guthrie ask for a "bairn's hymn" when he was dying is but an instinct of our nature, which leads us to complete the circle by folding together the ends of life. Childlike things are dearest to old age.

It is well to note the admirable selection of instructors. We are not at a loss to tell who instructed youthful Timothy. In the first chapter of this epistle Paul says, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." No doubt grandmother Lois and mother Eunice united in teaching the little one. Who should teach the children but the parents? Timothy's father was a Greek, and probably a heathen, but his child was happy in having a venerable grandmother, so often the dearest of all relatives to a little child. He had also a gracious mother, once a devout Jewess, and afterwards also a firmly believing Christian, who made it her daily pleasure to teach her own dear child the Word of the Lord. O dear mothers you have a very sacred trust reposed in you by God! He hath in effect said to you, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." You are called to equip the future man of God, that he may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Those who think that a woman detained at home by her little family is doing nothing, think the reverse of what is true. Scarcely can the godly mother quit her home for a place of worship; but dream not that she is lost to the work of the Church; far from it, she is doing the best possible service for her Lord. Mothers, the godly training of your offspring is your first and most pressing duty.

Nowadays, since the world has in it so few Christian mothers and grandmothers, the Church has thought it wise to supplement the instruction of home by teaching held under her fostering wing. Those children who have no such parents the church takes under her maternal care. I regard this as a very blessed institution. I am thankful for the many of our brothers and sisters who give their Sabbath-days, and many of them a considerable part of their week evenings also, to the teaching of other people's children, who somehow grow to be very much their own. They endeavor to perform the duties of fathers and mothers, for God's sake, to those children who are neglected by their own parents; and therein they do well. Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday School is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Yet it is a Christly work when others undertake the duty which the natural doers of it have left undone. The Lord Jesus looks with pleasure upon those who feed his lambs, and nurse his babes; for it is not his will that any of these little ones should perish. Come forward, earnest men and women, and sanctify yourselves for this joyful service.

Note the subject of the instruction. "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures": he was led to treat the Book of God with great reverence. I lay stress upon that word "holy scriptures." One of the first objects of the Sabbath School should be to teach the children great reverence for those holy writings, these inspired Scriptures. The Jews esteemed the Old Testament beyond all price; and though unfortunately many of them fell into a superstitious reverence for the letter and lost the spirit of it, yet were they much to be commended for their profound regard to the holy oracles. Especially is this feeling of reverence needed nowadays. If we are to have a church of God at all in the land, Scripture must be regarded as holy, and to be had in reverence. This Scripture was given by holy inspiration, and is not the result of dim myths and dubious traditions; neither has it drifted down to us by the survival of the fittest as one of the best of human books. It must be given to our children, and accepted by ourselves, as the infallible revelation of the Most Holy God. Lay much stress upon this; tell your children that the Word of the Lord is a pure Word, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Let their esteem for the Book of God be carried to the highest point.

Observe that Timothy was taught, not only to reverence holy things in general, but especially to know the Scriptures. The teaching of his mother and his grandmother was the teaching of holy scripture. Suppose we get the children together on Sabbath days, and then amuse them and make the hours to pass away pleasantly; or instruct them, as we do in the weekdays, in the elements of a moral education, what have we done? We have done nothing worthy of the day, or of the church of God. Suppose that we are particularly careful to teach the children the rules and regulations of our own church, and do not take them to the Scriptures; suppose that we bring before them a book which is set up as the standard of our church, but do not dwell upon the Bible—what have we done? The aforesaid standard may or may not be correct, and we may, therefore, have taught our children truth or have taught them error; but if we keep to holy scripture we cannot go aside. With such a standard we know that we are right. This Book is the Word of God, and if we teach it, we teach that which the Lord will accept and bless. O dear teachers—and I speak here to myself also—let our teaching be more and more scriptural! Fret not if our classes forget what we say, but pray them to remember what the Lord says. May divine truths about sin and righteousness, and judgment to come, be written on their hearts! May revealed truths concerning the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost never be forgotten by them! May they know the virtue and necessity of the atoning blood of our Lord, the power of his resurrection, and the glory of his second coming! May the doctrines of grace be graven as with a pen of iron upon their minds, and written as with the point of a diamond upon their hearts, never to be erased! If we can secure this, we have not lived in vain.

It appears that young Timothy was so taught as a child that the teaching was effectual. "Thou hast known the holy scriptures,"

says Paul. It is a good deal to say of a child that he has "known the holy scriptures." You may say, "I have taught the children the Scriptures," but that they have known them is quite another thing. Do all of you who are grown up know the Scriptures? I fear that although knowledge in general increases, knowledge of the Scriptures is far too rare. If we were now to hold an examination, I am afraid that some of you would hardly shine in the lists at the end. But here was a little child who knew the holy scriptures: that is to say, he had a remarkable acquaintance with them. God blessing your efforts, your children may know all of Scripture that is necessary to their salvation. They may have as true an idea of sin as their mother has: they may have as clear a view of the atonement as their grandmother can have; they may have as distinct a faith in Jesus as any of us can have. The things that make for our peace require no length of experience to prepare us for receiving them; they are among the simplicities of thought. He may run that reads them; and a child may read them as soon as he can run. The opinion that children cannot receive the whole truth of the gospel is a great mistake; for their child-condition is a help rather than a hindrance: older folk must become as little children before they can enter the kingdom. Do lay a good groundwork with the children. Let not Sunday School work be slurred, nor done in a slovenly manner. Let the children know the holy scripture. Let the Scriptures be consulted rather than any human book.

Our second head was to be that this work was QUICKENED BY A SAVING FAITH. The Scriptures do not save, but they are able to make a man wise unto salvation. Children may know the Scriptures, and yet not be children of God. Faith in Jesus Christ is that grace which brings immediate salvation. Many dear children are called of God so early, that they cannot precisely tell when they were converted; but they were converted: they must at some time or other have passed from death to life. You could not have told this morning, by observation, the moment when the sun rose, but it did rise; and there was a time when it was below the horizon and another time when it had risen above it. The moment, whether we see it or not, in which a child is really saved, is when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps for years Lois and Eunice had been teaching the Old Testament to Timothy, while they themselves did not know the Lord Jesus; and, if so, they were teaching him the type without the antitype—the riddles without the answers: but it was good teaching for all that, since it was all the truth which they then knew. How much happier, however, is our task, since we are able to teach concerning the Lord Jesus so plainly, having the New Testament to explain the Old! May we not hope that even earlier in life than Timothy, our dear children may catch the thought that Christ Jesus is the sum and substance of holy scripture, and so by faith in him may receive power to become the sons of God? I mention this, simple as it is, because I want all teachers to feel that if their children do not as yet know all the doctrines of the Bible, and if there be certain higher or deeper truths which their minds have not yet grasped, still children are saved as soon as they are wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Faith in the Lord Jesus, as he is set forth in Scripture, will surely save. "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," said Philip to the eunuch; and we say the same to every child.

Notice, that by this faith in Christ Jesus we continue and advance in salvation. The moment we believe in Christ we are saved; but we are not at once as wise as we may be, and hope to be. We may be as it were, saved unintelligently; I mean, of course, comparatively so; but it is desirable that we should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and so be wise unto salvation. By faith children become little disciples, and by faith they go on to become more proficient. How are we to go on to wisdom? Not by quitting the way of faith, but by keeping to that same faith in Christ Jesus by which we began to learn. In the school of grace faith is the great faculty by which we make advances in wisdom. If by faith you can read in the spelling book of simple faith, by the same faith in Christ Jesus you must go on to read in the classics of full assurance, and become a scribe well instructed in the things of the kingdom. Keep therefore close to the practice of faith, from which so many are turning aside. In these times men look to make progress by what they call thought, by which they mean vain imagination and speculation. We cannot advance a step by doubt; our only progress is by faith. Faith is the result to aim at; faith in the appointed, anointed and exalted Savior. This is the anchorage to which we would bring these little ships, for here they will abide in perfect safety.

Observe, that the text gives us a plain intimation that by faith knowledge is turned into wisdom. Exceedingly practical is the difference between knowledge and wisdom. See it in the text, "From a child thou hast known"; but it is faith, faith alone, that turns that knowledge into wisdom; and thus the holy scriptures are "able to make wise unto salvation." "Knowledge is power," but wisdom is the application of that power to practical ends. Knowledge may be bullion, but wisdom is the minted gold, fit for circulation among men. You can give your children knowledge without their having faith; but they must have faith given them of the Holy Ghost before that knowledge can become wisdom. Scriptural knowledge is wisdom when it influences the heart, when it rules the mind, when it affects the daily life, when it sanctifies the spirit, when it renews the will. O teachers, pray for your dear children, that God would give them faith in Christ Jesus, that so the knowledge which you have given them may turn to wisdom! Go as far as you can go with the teaching; but ever cry mightily unto the Lord, that his Holy Spirit may work regeneration, create faith, impart wisdom, and give salvation.

Learn yet again, that faith finds her wisdom in the use of knowledge conferred by the Scriptures. "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith." Faith never finds her wisdom in the thoughts of men, nor in pretended revelations; but she resorts to the inspired writings for her guidance. This is the well from which she drinks, the manna on which she feeds. Faith takes the Lord Jesus to be her wisdom. The knowledge of Christ is to her the most excellent of the sciences. She asks only—What is written? and when that question is answered, her difficulties are ended. I know it is not so

with this unbelieving age; and this it is which causes me to go mourning and lamenting. Woe to a church which rejects the testimony of the Lord! As for us, we abide by the Word of the Lord, and from it we will not stir an inch.

See then what is wanted for all of you who are unconverted. The holy scriptures must be made the means of your salvation through faith. Know the Bible, read the Bible, search the Bible; and yet that alone will not save you. What did our Lord himself say? "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me; and ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." If you come not to Jesus, you will miss eternal life. Searching the Scriptures is able to make you wise unto salvation "through faith which is in Christ Jesus"; but not without that faith.

I beg you to notice, in the third place, that sound instruction in holy scripture, when quickened by a living faith, CREATES A SOLID CHARACTER. The man who from a child has known the holy scriptures, when he obtains faith in Christ will be grounded and settled upon the abiding principles of the unchanging word of God. I wish it were so with the bulk of those who profess and call themselves Christians. In these days we are surrounded by unsettled minds, "ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth." These are carried about by every wind of doctrine. They follow any "clever" person, and in this prove that they are not the sheep of our Lord's pasture, of whom it is written, "A stranger will they not follow; for they know not the voice of strangers." We desire to build up a Church with those who know what they do know, and can give a reason for what they believe. The true believer's great reason for his faith is, "It is written." Christ our Master met the tempter in the wilderness with, "It is written." Though he was himself inspired, yet his teaching was full of the Old Testament; he was always quoting the words of the inspired Book, and therein setting us an example. If you and I would contend with Satan, and with an evil world, so as to overcome in the conflict, we must take care to take our stand squarely and firmly upon the Scriptures.

Those who know the Scriptures, and so believe in Jesus, are pillared up a personal acquaintance with the foundations of their faith. "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures": they were not treated with an ignorant reverence, but with an intelligent homage. How much I desire that each one of you may be a personal student of the holy scriptures! We need to know them for ourselves. Personally grasping them as a revelation to himself, the godly man loves them, studies them, feels them, lives upon them, and so knows them. By this means he becomes independent of other men. Paul is to die. Poor Timothy! Yes, it will be "poor Timothy!" if he carries his faith in Paul's bosom, and has none in his own heart. But Timothy's Bible is not going to die. Timothy's knowledge of Scripture is not going to be taken from him; nor is the Holy Spirit about to depart from him. Oh, to have a good personal building up upon the solid Word of God! then you will know what you do know, and you will hold fast to it, and there will be no driving you away from the standards of the faith.

The man that has been taught the Scripture from his youth is anchored by the divine influences of that Scripture. It has so operated upon him that he knows for himself its divine power. He knows the difference between truth and error by the effect produced on his heart and life. Without any boasting, he is able to discern between things that differ; because about scriptural truth there is a strange, mysterious unction, which does not attend the teachings of the most learned of men. I cannot explain to you what this unction is, but every child of God knows it. When I read a text of Scripture, even if I do not know it to be a text of Scripture by memory, I perceive its divine origin at once by a mystic influence which it exerts over my heart. The most striking passages of any sermon are texts well placed. God's word is living, and powerful, and has a power to enter the heart beyond that of any other word. The words of the Bible strike and stick: they enter and abide. He that has been taught in Scripture, steeped in Scripture, saturated with Scripture, is conscious of its permeating influence, and it gives him permanence of conviction. Like the crimson dye in cloth, the tint of Scripture is not to be got out of the soul when once fixed there; it is dyed ingrain, it enters into the very nature of the man. Bible truth influences his thoughts, words, and deeds: it is all-pervading; he begins to eat, and drink, and sleep holy scripture. The man's heart is fixed on God, fixed in the truth, fixed in holy living. He will stand fast, however evil the days.

Besides, a man that has once been taught in the Scripture, and to whose soul the Spirit has blessed that teaching, has come to yield himself to the supremacy of Scripture, and this must operate to the shaping of his character. I confess that sometimes I come across a text which does not at the first blush agree with other teachings of Scripture which I have already received, and this startles me for the moment. But one thing is settled in my heart, namely, that I will follow the Scripture wherever it leads me, and that I will renounce the most cherished opinion rather than shape a text or alter a syllable of the inspired Book. It is not mine to make God's Word consistent, but to believe that it is so. When a text stands in the middle of the road I drive no further. The Romans had a god they called "Terminus," who was the god of landmarks. Holy scripture is my sacred landmark, and I hear a voice which threatens me with a curse if I remove it. We want our children to have this deep reverence for Scripture, even as we have it ourselves. There it stands: the eternal pen has written it: we accept it. If God has said it, we have no desire to question it, lest the Scripture should say to us, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" We must bow before the infallibility of the Holy Ghost, and say, "Lord, teach me what this means. What I know not, teach thou me." He who goes through the world with an intense reverence for Scripture will be a man indeed. The Lord will make good in him that word—"They that honor me I will honor."

While on this point I would also say, that this kind of instruction will hold a man fast against the differing seductions of the age. Here I go into one place of worship, and I see a pretty little dollhouse at the further end, and people are bowing down before some paper flowers and candlesticks. Around the building I see pictures of virgins and saints; but he who has read his Bible enters not into this modern idolatry. A priest once said to a poor Irishman, "There will be no good come of your reading the Bible." "Why," replied the man, "it is written, 'Search the Scriptures.' Please, your Reverence, I was just reading 'Ye shall read it to your children,' and the priests have no children: how can you account for that?" "Ah!" replied the priest, "the like of you cannot understand the book." "Well," said the man, "if I cannot understand it, it will do me no harm; and if I can understand it, it will do me great good." Just so: the Bible is a very dangerous book to superstition, but to nothing else. Spread it, then, to the winds of heaven; and read it, every one of you. Love of holy scripture will be the sheet-anchor of the State as well as of the Church. If men are thoroughly grounded in holy scripture, we shall undergo political changes with great advantage; but if not, there is mischief brewing. That book is the cornerstone of our future hope.

Now, lastly, as this early teaching creates a fine solid character, so will it PRODUCE GREAT USEFULNESS. Thus Timothy became above all others a choice companion for Paul, one upon whom Paul looked with love and remembered with joy. Companions for apostles are only to be produced in the school of holy scripture. Those who have communed with Moses, and David, and the prophets, are fit to associate with an apostle. It is something to produce out of a child a comrade for a veteran servant of the living God. Let a man of God get side by side with a youth who knows the Scriptures, and he feels, "This is fit company for me." Paul, worn with years of persecution, strokes his gray beard, and his eyes light up with joy as he looks on that young Timothy. What is there about him more than about any other? Why, only that he knows the Scriptures, they have made him wise unto salvation. There were, no doubt, fine young fellows to be found who gloried in preferring the advanced thought of philosophers to the stereotyped teachings of holy scripture; but had they begun to talk to the apostle upon their new theories, Paul would have dismissed them with words of warning. He knew nothing of them or of their "other gospel," except that they troubled him and the churches. Without a scriptural training a convert has no grit, no backbone, and no soul in him. But when Paul looked on a gracious youth who knew the Scriptures, and held fast to them, he thanked God, and took courage.

This young man became a minister and an evangelist. He was a preacher of such a sort that we should have been glad to have heard him. God send us many such! Perhaps we might have said, "The young man's opinions were rather crude, and his expressions were somewhat rough; but we can put up with that from so young a man. On the other hand, what a richness of Scripture there was in him! What depth of thought! Did you not notice he had not gotten through a dozen sentences before he had quoted a Scripture? and when he came to prove his point he did not give half-a-dozen rationalistic arguments, but he brought out a single word from the Lord, and the point was settled." You must agree with a man who is at home with his Bible. This is the kind of preacher that we need more of. Instruct your children well, beloved teachers, that they also may become scriptural teachers in due time.

Timothy became, also, a great champion for the faith. He came forward, and in the midst of all those who were preaching false doctrine he stood firm to the end; steadfast, unmovable, courageous, because as a child he had known the Scriptures. O teachers, see what you may do! In your schools sit our future Evangelists. In that infant class sits an apostle to some distant land. There may come under your training hand, my sister, a future father in Israel. There shall come under your teaching, my brother, those that are to bear the banners of the Lord in the thick of the fray. The ages look to you each time your class assembles. Oh, that God may help you to do your part well!