

## Charles Hodge on the Effects of Scripture as Seen in History<sup>1</sup>

### *Testimony of History.*

There can, therefore, be no doubt that the Scriptures teach that the Word of God is the specially appointed means for the sanctification and the salvation of men. This doctrine of the Bible is fully confirmed by the experience of the Church and of the world. That experience teaches, — First, that no evidences of sanctification, no indications of the saving influences of the Spirit are found where the Word of God is unknown. This is not saying that none such occur. We know from the Bible itself, "That God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts x. 34, 35.) No one doubts that it is in the power of God to call whom He pleases from among the heathen and to reveal to them enough truth to secure their salvation. Nevertheless it remains a fact patent to all eyes that the nations where the Bible is unknown sit in darkness. The absence of the Bible is just as distinctly discernible as the absence of the sun. The declaration of the Scriptures is that "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John v. 19); and that declaration is confirmed by all history.

A second fact on which the testimony of experience is equally clear is, that true Christianity nourishes just in proportion to the degree in which the Bible is known, and its truths are diffused among the people. During the apostolic age the messengers of Christ went everywhere preaching his Gospel, in season and out of season; proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; requiring those to whom they preached to search the Scriptures; exhorting younger ministers to preach the Word; to hold forth the Word of life; to give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine; to meditate upon these things and to give themselves wholly to them. During this period the Gospel made more rapid progress, and perhaps brought forth more abundant fruits than during any equally long period of its history. When, however, the truth began to be more and more corrupted by the speculations of philosophy, and by the introduction of the Jewish doctrines concerning ceremonies and the priesthood; when "reserve" in preaching came into vogue, and it was held to be both lawful and wise to conceal the truth, and awaken reverence and secure obedience by other means; and when Christian worship was encumbered by heathen rites, and the trust of the people turned away from God and Christ, to the virgin and saints, then the shades of night overspread the Church, and the darkness became more and more intense, until the truth or light was almost entirely obscured. At the Reformation, when the chained Bible was brought from the cloisters, given to the press, and scattered over Europe, it was like the bright rising of the sun: the darkness was dissipated; the Church arose from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments, for the glory of God had arisen upon her. Wherever the reading and preaching of the Word was unrestricted, there light, liberty, and true religion prevailed, in a proportionate degree. Wherever the Bible was suppressed and the preaching of its truths was forbidden, there the darkness continued and still abides.

A third important fact equally well established is, that true religion<sup>2</sup> prevails in any community, in proportion to the degree in which the young are instructed in the facts and indoctrinated in the truths of the Bible. This, in one view, is included under the previous head, but it deserves separate notice. The question does not concern the reason why the religious education of the young is so important; or the way in which that education can most advantageously be secured; but simply the fact that where the young are from the beginning imbued with the knowledge of the Bible, there pure Christianity abides; and where they are allowed to grow up in ignorance of divine truth, there true religion languishes and loses more and more its power. Such is the testi-

mony of experience.

It is, therefore, the united testimony of Scripture and of history that the Bible, the Word of God, is the great means of promoting the sanctification and salvation of men, that is, of securing their temporal and eternal well being. Those consequently who are opposed to religion; who desire the reign of indifferentism, or the return of heathen doctrines and heathen morality, are consistent and wise in their generation, in endeavouring to undermine the authority of the Bible; to discourage its circulation; to discountenance attendance on its preaching; and especially to oppose its being effectually taught to the young. Those on the other hand who believe that without holiness no man can see God, and that without the light of divine truth, holiness is impossible, are bound as pastors, as parents, and as citizens to insist that the Bible shall have free course, and that it shall be faithfully taught to all under their influence or for whose training they are responsible.

#### End Notes

1. Hodge, C. (1997). *Systematic theology*. Originally published 1872. (3:468). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
2. Charles Hodge wrote in the 19th century when the term “religion” as used in America meant “Biblical Christianity” not “religion in general.”