

a community called ...

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EXALT THE WORD.

BY BISHOP CYRUS D. FOSS.

GOD has spoken. We have his word. It is all abroad in the earth in more than three hundred languages. It has been copied by pen and press a thousand times more than any other book. All down the ages it has been thrust upon the attention of the world, demanding search, belief, homage, obedience.

It has been tested sharply, skillfully, remorselessly, and in multitudinous ways. Every joint in its celestial armor has been tried again and again by swords and spears of infernal temper. Persecution has decreed its destruction. Scientific theories have proclaimed its falsity. Rationalistic "higher

criticism" has self-complacently announced its utter lack of authenticity. All these and other forces of opposition have affected it very much as thunder and storms do Mont Blanc. The clouds around its base only make it seem loftier and more resplendent.

Is it not high time for those who teach the Bible to give a truce to nervousness, and go ahead as though nothing had happened? As, indeed, nothing has happened to affect in the slightest degree the substance of "the faith" or the all-conquering power of the word. I am satisfied that religious doubt gets a large part of its currency in our time from the careless suggestion of it by ministers and Sunday-school teachers, who often crudely state and overstate objections which they have not the skill effectually to answer, thus making themselves teachers of infidelity. The great business of the pulpit and of the Sunday-school is to teach the Bible, and to urge its claim on the belief and obedience of all who listen. Let us teach it, and not busy

ourselves in suggesting doubts about it. Children, youth, and the masses of church-going people urgently need to know what the Bible says.

I plead with young ministers to exalt the word of God. Don't be perpetually apologizing for the Lord God Almighty. Find out what he has said, and tell the people. There was hard sense in the reply of a plain man who was urged to read Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, and who, misapprehending the technical meaning of a single word, answered, "No, I don't want it; the Bible needs no apology." Paul's charge to Timothy is everlastingly timely: "I charge thee before God, preach the word." Preach it, proclaim it, and trust God to make a way for it to the hearts of men. Preach it, and not some weak dilution of it. Treat it as your Lord did. Consider well what he said about it, and what he did with it. He said: "Search the Scriptures; for . . . they . . . testify of me;" and, "If they hear not Moses

and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." And in the pinch of his sorest need he turned to the Old Testament, and used what he found there as the very word of God. In his forty days' duel with the devil he drew no sword but what fits my hand as well as his. He seemed to have no concern as to whether the whole Bible is verbally inspired or not, or as to whether Moses wrote the whole of the Pentateuch; but, keeping his eye on the foe, he thrust his hand back as though almost at random, and drew from the sheath of Deuteronomy three golden blades before whose glittering points Satan fled.

Dig evermore in this exhaustless mine. The grandly effective preachers are biblical preachers. The greatest sermons are those which make the word seem great.

Sunday-school teachers, exalt the word. Your great business in preparation is to find out what God says. Your general study of the Bible ought to consist largely in a com-

parison of Scripture with Scripture, and in thoughtful and prayerful meditation on the word itself; and your special preparation of the lesson should be chiefly a diligent search after the very meaning of the Holy Spirit in the verses. Teach your scholars to handle the book, to find the verses promptly, to reverence it as the very word of God, to obey it.

The Sunday-school should be a Bible-school, and nothing else. I wish its name could be changed to that. In these days of blackboards and orchestras and Sunday-school libraries and multiplied other appliances, let it not be forgotten what all these things are for, and let them not crowd aside the very thing for which the Sunday-school exists.

Dr. James W. Alexander, one of the most suggestive of writers on preaching and Sunday-school teaching, gave most emphatic testimony on this point: "Having been, in one or another capacity, busied about Sunday-

schools for forty years, I venture my judgment, that, if a pupil must forego one or the other—the explanation of the meaning by question and answer, or the possession of the text in his memory *verbatim*—he would better let go the former. With those attainments which such knowledge insures or infers, there is no part of household and juvenile learning so valuable as what in good old idiomatic mother-English is called getting verses by heart. Having almost worn out my eyes by reading and study, let me testify to you, of all I ever learned, I most prize what is level to you all—that is, the knowledge of the English Bible ; and for one verse that I know by heart I wish I knew a hundred.”

Parents are under the pressure of an obligation concerning the Bible which it is to be feared very few of them justly appreciate, and which many totally ignore. Let a father distinctly admit the truth of these three propositions : (1) That the greatest want of his children is religious knowledge and mo-

tive; (2) that the Bible is the chief store-house of such knowledge and motive; (3) that the character and the eternal destiny of his children are largely dependent on their use of the Bible—and how can he fail to be a priest in his own household? Do not suppose your duty done if you give each of your children a gilt-edged copy of the Bible, and send them to the Sunday-school and take them to church. Before they are old enough to read teach them to love the Bible. Teach them its stories and precepts. Read to them some of the numerous excellent books of Bible history. They will listen as they would to Æsop or Mother Goose.

They will surprise and delight you with deep questions about God and duty and destiny. And what they thus learn they will never forget. Train them in private prayer and in family worship. I regard the decay of home-worship as one of the alarming signs of our times. Have a family altar, and make the worship there various and interesting. I

remember with perpetual gratitude such an altar, at which my father so read the Scriptures as to hold attention, now and then reading them with moistened eye and tremulous lip, and which my widowed mother kept up until her sons were old enough to take her place. I can never forget my father's last words to his sons, words weighted with deep and lasting power of impression because backed by a life which justified such dying counsel—"And thou, . . . my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: . . . if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever." One of those four sons soon followed the father to the better country, and the other three all followed their father's steps into the ministry of the same Church.

When, in her ninetieth year, the aged mother passed on to the goodly fellowship above, she left the old family Bible to the sole survivor,

with this inscription : " This time-worn, time-stained holy book, the guide and director of a once happy, unbroken household in their daily worship of the triune God, remains a precious relic, which I transfer to my dear son."

The private reading and study of the Holy Scriptures is, of course, the solid basis for the proper use of them in the pulpit, the Sunday-school, and the family, and, when duly accompanied by needed explanatory readings and prayer, it is the tap-root of the Christian life. In some homes many books have crowded out " the one book," or have crowded it into very narrow quarters. The daily paper is regularly read ; the religious weekly and the literary magazine receive attention ; some favorite books are often in hand—but what proportion of professing Christians, and of religiously disposed, church-going people give their Bible any regular, thoughtful, deliberate attention every day? Too often this great duty and priceless privilege

is left to odd scraps of time, or omitted altogether.

A striking proof of the divinity of the Bible is that it has accomplished so much in the world in spite of the misuse, or non-use, or imperfect use of it by its friends. Who doubts that Christian character would be far richer, and church activities tenfold more successful, if Christians generally would put in practice the most familiar suggestions concerning the use of the word of God? I submit these: (1) Read the Bible regularly every day; (2) as nearly as possible at a fixed hour; (3) alone in your room; (4) never when in haste; (5) the morning is the best time, but if you have found no other opportunity during the day, take time immediately before retirement at night; (6) read in course; (7) select, in addition, from any part of the Bible, such passages as you especially need; (8) from time to time read largely—several chapters, or a whole epistle or other book, at a sitting. In this way give your Bible a chance to

pour into your soul its great tides of truth; (9) above all, read devoutly, as for your soul's life. Prayer is the key that unlocks the word.

Two things have often struck thoughtful observers of the religious life—the maturest saints are those most saturated with the Bible, and those who read it most love it best, and find the most in it that is fresh and new.

In my early ministry I had occasion frequently to visit an aged man who had been for many years bed-ridden. His spiritual life was constantly fed from the perennial fountains, and I always found him serene, and often triumphant. One day I found him with a large copy of the Psalms in his thin white hands, and said to him: "Father Knapp, you do not seem tired of the word." "Tired of the word!" he answered; "no, indeed. I have read the whole Bible through sixty-seven times, and am now as far as the Psalms in my sixty-eighth reading of it; and I de-

clare to you, pastor, I have found more in it that is fresh and new this time than ever before."

Truly, "thy testimonies are wonderful." By some means, by all means, exalt the word. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. . . . Exalt her, and she shall promote thee."

HUNT & EATON,
150 Fifth Ave., New York.

CRANSTON & STOWE,
190 W. Fourth St., Cincinnati, O.

