

THE LIGHT OF THE WORD

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Blackout is one of about two hundred new expressions given the American reading public since the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. The American Bible Society is operating its world-wide program of Bible distribution under the timely motto, "There Must be no Blackout of the Bible." Their slogan for this year is, "The Light Shines in the Darkness."

If there is to be no blackout of spiritual illumination in this time of deepening shadows, there must be a new entrance of God's Word into the affairs of men.

The Psalmist's hope is our hope. "The entrance of thy words giveth light" (Psalm 119: 130). This passage suggests that God's Word gives light, and in order to do this it must find an entrance. It may be encouraging in this time of dimness to note briefly some of the Bible's influence in modern times since its translation by Martin Luther. It may be instructive, then, to note some ways by which the Bible may become more interesting and more meaningful.

I. The Light of God's Word

Much could be written concerning the influence of the Bible throughout its history, but we here wish to note only a few illustrations of its place in our immediate background.

Modern progress began soon after Martin Luther gave to his people the Bible in their own language—a herculean task which few fully appreciate. Luther gave not only the Bible, but that Bible changed the German language from two hundred different dialects into one beautiful and expressive tongue, and it is the German language of today.

The nearest approach to Luther's influence on the German language is the great poet Goethe. He considered Luther's work to be one of the marvels of all literature because he so completely "cast into one mold the poetical, the historical, the oratory, and the didactic note."

Of the Bible itself, Goethe says: "It is a belief in the Bible which has served me as a guide of my moral and literary life. The farther the ages advance in civilization, the more will the Bible be used."

To the voice of the German poet is added the words of the renowned German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who declared, "The existence of the Bible as a book for the people is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity."

England soon followed Germany in its demand for the Bible; and as Luther's translation gave to his people a great language, so the King James' English translation has been the wellspring, not only of the English language but of English literature as well.

Of the Bible the English author and critic, John Ruskin, says: "Everything that I have written, every greatness that has been in any thought of mine, whatever I have done in my life has been simply due to the fact that when I was a child my mother daily read with me a part of the Bible and daily made me learn a part of it by heart."

A stalwart in the command of English prose, Thomas Carlyle, once said, "The period of the Reformation was a judgment day for Europe, when all the nations were presented with an open Bible and all the emancipation of heart and intellect which an open Bible involves."

America has likewise felt the influence of the Bible and recognizes her debt in statements by such men as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Woodrow Wilson, and Nicholas Murray Butler.

Says Emerson: "The most original book in the world is the Bible. People imagine that the place that the Bible holds in the world it owes to miracles. It owes it simply to the fact that it came out of profounder depths than any other book."

Woodrow Wilson reminds us of our responsibility as well as our heritage when he says: "America was born a Christian nation, to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scriptures."

President Butler, of Columbia University, New York City, warns us that, "We are in danger of forgetting that there is one Book so supreme in its contexts, so influential in its message, and so extraordinary in its form that it has been called the Book of books, par excellence. The English Bible is the greatest single work of letters that the world has yet produced. I recommend to you not only the study but also the companionship of the English Bible."

Perhaps a volume would not contain the vast number of such statements by eminent Americans in all walks of life. It is sufficient to say that thinking men everywhere recognize that God's Word is the source of enlightenment, that the entrance of God's words giveth light.

Since Luther's translation of the Bible into the language of the common people, its influence has gathered momentum so that today either the whole Bible or portions of it have translated into a ringing message! Surely today every man hears in his own tongue the wonderful works of God. This is no less than a modern miracle of Pentecost, a speaking in tongues that enlightens all men.

II. The Entrance of God's Word

This illuminating Word that possesses unlimited potential light is without effect unless it gains an entrance. The Bible requires a larger place in the thought of our time. Our chief concern is not so much its historic role as its role in the present and the future. It seems appropriate to suggest some specific ways whereby the Bible may become more meaningful today.

We often bring to our reading of the Bible so many prejudices, preconceived ideas and pet theories seeking support that every avenue for new light is blocked. How long has it been since we have received a new and disturbing idea from the Word? Or are we so well established in our experience that all we need and expect is confirmation of our present attainment?

The Bible is not a "yes man" that agrees with what you say or think on every occasion! It is the greatest challenger of human thought that ever disturbed the open mind. The greatest minds of every age which have encountered God's Word have bowed to it in humble respect. We insult its inherent dignity when we merely seek its "OK" for our pet theories.

Our souls are liable not only to be full of distorted ideas, but in many instances we are too indifferent to know the Word. Too many things of seeming greater importance take our attention, "the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire of other things" choke the Word. Our pre-occupations

as well as our prejudices hinder the entrance of God's light.

If we will go to the Word with an alert and open mind and the faith of a child, one will linger in the joy of its wealth. No teachable person ever finds the Bible uninteresting.

How shall we approach the Word so that it will find entrance? The following methods of approach may be found helpful.

1. Devotional. Who can think of worshipping God without using the Word? It is this very Word that brings God near. Every Christian needs and desires his daily devotion, and the Bible is without doubt the greatest part of this devotion. We need to do little talking and much listening.

2. Individual Study. As a field for individual study, the Bible has never been exhausted; in fact, its far horizons beckon as no other book does. Martin Luther says, "For several years I have read the whole Bible through twice in every twelve months. It is a great and powerful tree, each word of which is a mighty branch: each of these branches have I well shaken, so desirous was I to learn what fruit each one of them bore, and what they would give me. And the shaking of them has never disappointed me."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge reverses the usual attitude of search when he declares, "In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together; the words of the Bible finds me at greater depths of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we need to let the Scriptures search us."

You ask "How can I best study the Bible?" Study it as you study any field of knowledge—telescopically and microscopically; study it in the large and study it in detail; study it with perspective and study it in particular. Gain the beauty of the forest landscape and also behold the beauty of the trees. In short, study both the whole and its parts.

In general each of the sixty-six books of the Bible should be studied as a whole, all the while being considered as a part of the larger whole, the entire Bible itself. Such a study will reveal rich relationships among the various books.

As we study each book of the Bible as a whole, we will study its parts (not necessarily its chapters, paragraphs, verses, etc., although they are convenient divisions in most instances)—we will study the parts as part of the whole individual book. This will likewise reveal rich relationships, such as comparison and contrast, cause and effect.

In this method we will also note that the author of each book reveals his point of view by his comparative emphasis or omission of person, place, event, things, etc., etc.

3. Group Study. What has been said of individual study applies fully to group study, each individual working as a part of the whole group. The greatest of scholars can learn from the least because each person represents a singular viewpoint.

Why did Luther's translation of the Bible over four hundred years ago create such an intellectual and spiritual revolution? Because of his prestige as a scholar? No, it was the Bible in the hands of the common man that gave Europe its enlightenment and reformation.

The light that brought England's illumination shone from the open Bible through the