

CHAPTER III

THE DIVINE POWER OF THE BIBLE

We have seen that the divine origin and authority of the Bible is conclusively proven. We now turn to a consideration of its divine power as experienced in the lives and hearts of men. The Bible exhibits its unmistakably divine power in many directions.

1. *First of all, the Bible possesses and exerts divine power in convicting men of sin.* Explain it as we may, it is certain that the Bible possesses a strange power, possessed by no other book, of opening the eyes of men to the fact that they are great sinners in the presence of a Holy God. It proves itself in actual trial "the sword of the Spirit," pricking men to the heart as on the day of Pentecost. (Acts ii. 37.) How many thousands and tens of thousands of men who were careless or self-satisfied have been brought under deep convic-

tion of sin while reading the Bible, or by a single verse of Scripture that some one has quoted to them? There is case after case on record of heathen who have never before seen a Bible or heard of one, into whose hands a portion of the Bible has fallen, who have been overwhelmed by conviction at reading that portion of Scripture. Their hearts have been laid bare, and they have seen themselves in all their vileness. Infidels who have sneered at the book have been struck down by its power. An utterly irreligious and impious man who had not been in a church for fifteen years strayed one night into a meeting where the writer was speaking. In the course of the sermon a verse of Scripture was quoted that pierced like an arrow to the man's heart. He tried to pull it out, and could not. It rankled. He walked the streets and cursed the text. At last, after weeks of vain resistance, he walked into the church again, and arose and told his experience, and surrendered to Christ. Instances of that kind could be multiplied without number. The Bible does possess a divine power of laying bare the heart and revealing us to ourselves as God sees us.

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It is, as every faithful preacher of it knows, "like a fire and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces." It is the one instrument that breaks hearts of adamant. The self-righteous moralist can be transformed into the penitent sinner by its power. Proud-hearted men are humbled when they are brought face to face with a Holy God and hear His voice, and as a matter of demonstrated experience men hear the voice of God in the Bible, and are convicted of sin and brought down upon their faces before the God whose voice they there hear. It is men who preach the Bible, and personal workers who use the Bible, who prove themselves mighty in bringing men under deep conviction of sin and to true repentance.

2. *The Bible possesses divine power to regenerate men, to make them new creatures, to impart to them a new nature, to make them partakers of the divine nature.* This also is a fact that has been proven tens of thousands of times. While some have been speculating about the authorship of the various books of the Bible, and trying to construct a philo-

sophical theory of inspiration, wiser and more practical men have been studying the actual contents of the book, and expounding its truth to a lost world. And God has set His seal upon their labors in a wonderful way. While the former class have succeeded only in filling the minds of men with questions and doubts, or, at the best, have simply convinced them intellectually of the authenticity of the book, the latter have transformed men from lives of sin and selfishness and despair into lives of holiness, self-renunciation, likeness to God, peace and joy and hope. In actual use the Bible proves itself to possess regenerating power. On the board of deacons of the writer's church there are at least six men who were once drunkards, outcasts, and thoroughly reprobate, who are now living most exemplary lives, who are centers of power in the community in which they live, and the change was wrought in each one of them by the power of the Bible. One of them was a most wicked, reckless, and blasphemous fellow. He has stood outside the church in which he is now a deacon with a pitcher of intoxicating liquor, and offered it to people as they came out. It

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seemed necessary to warn people against his influence in the inquiry meeting which he frequented. But he went home one night and went to bed a godless wretch. In the middle of the night he woke up with a passage of the Bible burning in his heart. Without getting out of bed, he closed with God's offer of mercy in Christ, and arose in the morning a transformed man. The transformation has stood a quarter of a century of testing as to its reality. The Bible will make any man who will study it, believe it, and obey it, a new creature. It will impart to him new tastes, new affections, new purposes, a new disposition, a new character through and through. It will make him a true child of God. He will be "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the word of God*, which liveth and abideth forever" (I. Pet. i. 23). This power to transform ruined men into the likeness of God, to make them actual partakers of God's own nature, is unquestionably divine, and this power the Bible unquestionably possesses.

3. *The Bible possesses divine power to produce faith.* Faith is the gift of God, but it is by His word that God imparts this gift. It is not merely a statement of the Bible "that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. x. 17); it is also a fact of experience. It is the Bible itself that transforms men from skeptics and infidels and agnostics into believers in God, believers in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and believers in the Bible as the word of God. The Bible has a self-evidencing power that no other book possesses. Books on Christian evidences are very good in their place, but if you can get a skeptic or agnostic to honestly and thoroughly study the Bible itself, it will quickly convince him that it is of God. In the days of the writer's utter doubt and darkness books of Christian evidences were helpful, but the unwavering, abounding faith that he enjoys today in the Bible as the absolute word of God has come more from the study of the book itself than from anything else, and this is the testimony of all who have honestly and thoroughly studied it. One book in the Bible, the Gospel of John, has in the writer's experi-

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ence with skeptics and agnostics been used to lead very many out of the darkness of unbelief into the light and joy of an assured faith in Jesus as the Son of God. It is as certain that the Bible has power to produce faith in the heart of one who really desires to know and obey the truth as it is that food satisfies hunger and water quenches thirst.

The Bible has also power to produce the faith that asks and get great things in prayer, and the faith that attempts and achieves great things in service. George Müller stands out as the one man above others in our day who has wrought wonders by prayers, a poor man who got together nearly eight million dollars for the Lord's work by simply asking for it, and this was but part of what he wrought. This mighty man has left us in no doubt as to the secret of his power in prayer. He tells us that always before praying he pondered the word of God, and his prayers were begotten of Bible study. As he thus pondered the word, his faith waxed strong to lay hold of God for great things, and he got them. Where is the mighty man of prayer that has ever come forth from the womb of the higher criticism?

The power of prayer is not a matter of speculation, but demonstration, and it is born of Bible study.

4. *The Bible possesses divine power to cleanse from the sin and imperfection that still clings to him, the one who has been already begotten again by its power.* The Bible has power not only to take impurity out of the heart, but to remove it from the outward life as well. It is true to-day as it was in the days of the Psalmist, that the wherewithal for one to cleanse his way is by taking heed thereto according to God's word, and that the best way to keep from sinning against God is by hiding God's word in the heart (Ps. cxix. 9, 11). The man or woman who systematically, thoughtfully, prayerfully, obediently studies the Bible will find their lives growing white. We have seen this demonstrated again and again in the lives of people from all ranks of society. We have seen it proven in the lives of persons born in the slums, and who inherited the instincts and habits and language of the slums. We have seen it just as clearly proven in the lives of those who were reared in the

midst of culture, refinement, and high ethical ideals. It might seem that the characters and lives of such would be unsullied anyway, but by the study of the cleansing book those lives and characters have become whiter and whiter as they approached the dazzling whiteness of the absolute holiness of Him who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all (I. John i. 6).

5. *The Bible possesses divine power to promote growth of Christian character.* Life is a gift of God. It defies all man's ingenuity and all the progress of his science to produce it. Growth, also, is God's work. Only the things that God has made promote growth, the things that themselves have life in them. The Bible possesses this power to promote growth. Other things being equal, men grow in beauty and strength and completeness of character just in proportion as they study the Bible. Other books in which there is a large admixture of Bible truth promote growth because of the Bible truth that is in them; but to this day no book promotes growth by its study as does the Bible itself. The writer of this book

has enjoyed unusual opportunities to observe this fact, as superintendent of an institute devoted exclusively to Bible study, where several hundred are regularly enrolled as students each year, and six thousand persons attend the evening classes, and as pastor of a church of sixteen hundred members, where unusual emphasis is laid upon Bible study. Large numbers of persons just beginning the Christian life, others who have been Christians for years, but who are suffering from retarded spiritual development, persons of all degrees of culture and of all sorts of domestic and social environment, have been seen to enter at once upon a period of rapid, healthy, continuous, steady, symmetrical growth when they have begun the systematic, daily, study of the Bible. It is easily demonstrable by practical experiment that the power of God in promoting growth is in the Bible as it is in no other book, nor in all other books taken together. Every one who has tried it has found in the Bible milk for babes and meat for those who are full age, the finest of the wheat and honey out of the rock. A Christian who neglects the Bible, whatever else he may read,

can no more grow as he ought than a babe can grow without proper nutriment. On the other hand, whosoever having been born again will daily, prayerfully, and obediently study the Bible will grow in grace and in the knowledge of God and in likeness to God, even if every other book is neglected.

6. *The Bible possesses divine power to make those who rightly study it wise.* Any one can find near at hand conclusive evidence that the entrance of God's words as found in the Bible giveth light to individuals and to nations (Ps. cxix. 130). Who has not known men and women of most meager general culture, and yet of rarest wisdom? When the solution of this mystery was sought, it was found in the fact that though these men and women had not enjoyed the advantages of reading many books, they had pondered much the one book. It is indisputable that there is more of the wisdom that is real and eternal in the Bible than in all the literature of the ages. The man who knows his Bible is a well-educated man, and the man who neglects the Bible is not a well-educated man, no matter what else he

has studied. The one who thoroughly studies his Bible, even if he does not study any other book, will know more of real wisdom, the wisdom that counts for eternity as well as time, wisdom that this perishing world needs to know, wisdom for which countless hungry hearts are starving to-day, than the man who reads all other books and neglects the Bible. How often in the history of the world men of culture, men of science, men of philosophy, men of genius, have sat at the feet of the man of one book, the Bible, and learned wisdom from him. The greatest man in the religious world to-day, the man who wields the mightiest influence, the man before whom theologians, ecclesiastics, and metaphysicians have to give way, the man who exerts mighty influence even in educational circles, is a man utterly unversed in the wisdom of the schools, but who knows the Bible. The Bible possesses a power that is altogether unique and manifestly divine to make men wise.

7. *The Bible possesses divine power to bring peace to conscience-stricken, anguish-riven, and care-burdened hearts.* The true God is "the

God of peace." He only can give peace that is deep, abiding, real, eternal. There is one chosen instrument by which He works His wondrous peace in the soul; that instrument is the Bible. Jesus proved that His voice was the voice divine by saying to tempest-tossed Galilee, "Peace, be still," and "there was a great calm." The Bible proves that its voice is the voice divine in a similar way. It says to the raging heart, "Peace, be still," and again there is "a great calm." Nothing in human experience is more certain than that the Bible has a power, peculiar to itself, of imparting peace to the heart of man. Who that has dealt with men could not multiply instances of this? One verse of the Bible brought peace to a woman who for fourteen years had been a conscience-hunted and remorse-haunted wanderer on the face of the earth. Another woman who was burdened by such cares, and broken-hearted over such sorrows as come to but few, in a moment's time found peace through another verse of Scripture. A man of exceptional education and brilliant abilities, but tortured with an agony that had driven him to attempt suicide five

times, found through another verse of Scripture a peace so wonderful that this peace has been overflowing ever since to many, many others. These are but a few of countless illustrations in the experience of the writer in applying the Bible to tormented hearts. Nothing from Emerson, or Carlyle, or Ruskin, or Marcus Aurelius, or Epictetus, or Seneca, or Socrates, or Buddha, or Confucius, or Mohammed, or any one else would have produced a like effect. There is one book that has power to produce peace in any heart that will listen, believe, obey: that book is the Bible.

8. *The Bible possesses divine power to produce joy.* Joy that is pure, deep, real, abiding, eternal, is from God. He gives it, maintains it, increases it, through the Bible. There is no gladness comparable to that which comes through meditation upon and acceptance of the words recorded in the Bible. The saddest man I ever met became one of the happiest men I ever knew through being introduced by me to the Bible and its contents. A year or so ago I met a physician who was leading an aimless, joyless, life. He was

induced to become a student of the Bible. I now meet him almost every day, when home. His face is always radiant, and when he speaks to me, as he usually does, it is always some story of the joy with which God has filled his heart through the study of the Bible. Is there any other book or books which I could have set him to studying with the same results? Jeremiah's experience is being repeated by thousands daily: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jer. xv. 16). There is in the Bible a power to produce such a joy as God alone can give, a joy entirely different than comes from any human or earthly source. The power of God is in the book.

The Bible possesses divine power in still other directions. It begets patience in those who are being tried, it comforts those who are in any sorrow, it awakens hope that never falters, it safeguards against all the errors of false teachers and wiles of the devil. But enough has been said. If there is anything capable of scientific demonstration by actual experiment it is that the power of God is in

the Bible in a way that it is in no other book. The only way any one can question it is by ignoring facts of daily occurrence that are open to the observation of anybody.

The Bible is of divine origin, it possesses divine authority, it displays divine power. Happy, then, is the man who ponders daily its wonderful words, who believes all that it teaches, who puts into practice its heaven-born precepts, who cherishes the hopes which God, who cannot lie, has promised in it. There can be no mistake more inexcusable and fatal than to doubt, disobey, or neglect the Bible.