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The Book that speaks for itself

“Defend the Bible!?! That's like defending a Lion!”

C H Spurgeon

Below- Extract from 'Does God Believe in Atheists' by John Blanchard

Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth United States president, declared, 'Give the Bible to the people, unadulterated, pure, unaltered, uncheapened, and then see it work through the whole nature.'

Other leading office-holders have expressed similar convictions. When John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, lay on his deathbed, and was asked if he had any counsel to give his children, he replied, 'They have the Book.' William Jennings Bryan, secretary of state in the Wilson administration, once said, 'The Bible holds up before us ideals that are within sight of the weakest and the lowliest, and yet so high that the best and noblest are kept with their faces turned ever upward.' In the opinion of Charles Colson, special counsel to President Richard Nixon in the early 1970's, 'Nothing has affected the rise and fall of civilization, the character of cultures, the structure of government, and the lives of the inhabitants of this planet as profoundly as the words of the Bible.'

These are fine-sounding sentiments, but is there concrete evidence to back them up? The difficulty here is not in beginning to answer the question, but in knowing when to stop.

Commenting on social and moral progress in the country around the beginning of the seventeenth century, historian John Richard Green wrote, 'No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England.... England became the people of a book, and that book was the Bible.'

When Charles Darwin first visited Tierra del Fuego, he found the inhabitants in a state of misery and moral degradation, but when he returned some years later, after the Bible had been introduced by missionaries, 'The change for the better was so indescribable that he not only testified his astonishment but became a regular contributor to the missionary society.'

Many of the most profound social changes which took place in Great Britain during the nineteenth century were triggered by men and women who found their motivation in Scripture. A handful of examples speak for many others. While he was still a young lawyer, William Wilberforce (1759-1833)

began campaigning against the slave trade. By the time he became a Member of Parliament, he was pouring most of his energies into the cause, and slavery was eventually abolished in 1807. Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) pioneered prison reform in Britain and Europe, sponsored social work among London's homeless, and formed a society for care and rehabilitation of discharged criminals. The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885) was at the forefront of revolutionizing the working-class conditions that had been created by the Industrial Revolution, and improving the status and conditions of the mentally ill. He championed the cause of women and children working in mines and collieries, promoted legislation to protect children used as chimney sweeps and devoted a prodigious amount of time to direct social work. Thomas Barnardo (1865-1905) established a home for destitute children in 1870. By the time he died, nearly 60,000 children had been admitted to his homes, 20,000 had been helped to emigrate and a further 250,000 had been given material help of one kind or another.

After the famous mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1879, the nine mutineers were put ashore on Pitcairn Island, along with six native men, ten native women and a fifteen-year old girl. Soon afterwards, someone succeeded in distilling a crude form of alcohol, a 'success' which led to widespread abuse, the deaths of nearly all the mutineers, and several savage murders. Somewhere among the belongings of those who had died, a Bible and book of common prayer were found. Reading the Bible led James Adams and Ned Young to a radical change of life and to a determination to build among the natives a society in which the Bible would be the island's rule of life. The change was so dramatic that several years later visitors found what virtually amounted to a model society, with crime unknown and life and property completely safe.

Some years ago, Reader's Digest carried a story entitled 'Shimabuku- the village that lives by the Bible'. It told how an advance patrol of American troops liberating the Island of Okinawa were approaching a particular village when they were confronted by two old men carrying a Bible. Suspicious of a trap, they called for the chaplain, who said he felt they could go on. Entering the village, they found it spotless, the fields tilled and fertile, and everything a model of neatness and cleanliness- totally unlike the other run-down villages they had seen. They soon discovered the reason for this amazing contrast. Thirty years earlier, an American missionary on his way to Japan had called at Shimabuku and stayed long enough to leave behind two men who had come to believe in God. He also left a Japanese Bible, which he urged them to study and live by. Without any other outside human help, the community had gradually been transformed. There was no jail, no brothel, no drunkenness, no divorce, a high standard of health and a remarkable spirit of social unity and happiness. Clarence Hall, the war correspondent who wrote the story, quoted the words of his dumbfounded driver: 'So this is what comes out of a Bible.... Maybe we are using the wrong weapons to change the world!'

These are some of the headlines, but the small print is even more impressive. On the day these words are being written, and on whichever day they are being read, millions of people all around the world, from every segment of society, are making the reading and study of the Bible part of their chosen lifestyle and would testify to its pervasive influence in their lives. Their testimony is that the Bible presents them with a credible theology, helps them distinguish between truth and error, offers them a coherent world-view, provides them with stable moral principles, guides them in times of decision, strengthens them in their trials, nourishes their enlivened spirits and comforts them in their sorrows. The seventeenth-century minister John Flavel once wrote, 'The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering and the most comfortable way of dying.' Countless millions of people have found Flavel's words endorsed in their own experience, and for Richard Dawkins(one of the most outspoken atheists of our day) to suggest that for parents and others to teach children from the Bible is 'mental child abuse' is clearly absurd.