

INFALLIBILITY—WHERE TO FIND IT AND HOW TO USE IT

NO. 1208

A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 20, 1874
 BY C. H. SPURGEON
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“It is written.”
Matthew 4:4

THOUGHTFUL minds anxiously desire some fixed point of belief. The old philosopher wanted a fulcrum for his lever, and believed that if he could only obtain it he could move the world. It is uncomfortable to be always at sea, we would fain discover *terra firma* and plant our feet upon a rock. We cannot rest till we have found out something which is certain, sure, settled, decided, and no longer to be questioned.

Many a mind has peered into the hazy region of rationalism, and has seen nothing before it but perpetual mist and fog, and shivering with the cold chill of those arctic regions of skepticism, it has yearned for a clearer light, a warmer guide, a more tangible belief.

This yearning has driven men into strange beliefs. Satan, seeing their ravenous hunger, has made them accept a stone for bread. Many have held and still do hold, that it is possible to find your infallible foundation in the Pope of Rome. I do not wonder that they would rather have an infallible man than be altogether without a standard of truth. Yet it is so monstrous an idea that men should believe in papal infallibility, that did they not themselves avow it we should think it most insulting to accuse them of it.

How any mind can by any possible contortion twist itself into a posture in which it will be capable of accepting such a belief is one of the mysteries of manhood. Why, the popes err in trifles, how much more in great matters?

In Disraeli's, “Curiosities of Literature” is the following amusing incident, under the title of “Errata”—“One of the most egregious of all literary blunders is that of the edition of the Vulgate, by Sixtus V. His Holiness carefully superintended every sheet as it passed through the press, and to the amazement of all the world, the world remained without a rival—it swarmed with errata! A multitude of scraps were printed to paste over the erroneous passages, in order to give the true text.

“The book makes a whimsical appearance with these patches, and the heretics exulted in this demonstration of papal infallibility! The copies were called in and violent attempts made to suppress it. A few still remain for the raptures of Biblical collectors, at a late sale the Bible of Sixtus V. fetched above sixty guineas—not too much for a mere book of blunders! The world was highly amused at the bull of the editorial pope prefixed to the first volume, which excommunicates all printers who in reprinting the work should make any *alterations* in the text!”

The notion of infallibility residing in mortal man is worthy of a madhouse, and scarcely deserves to be seriously discussed. You can scarcely read a page of such history, as even Catholics admit to be authentic without discovering that popes have been men, and not gods, and their bulls have been as blundering and erroneous as the decrees of worldly princes. So long as a clear understanding remains to a man, he cannot repose in the imaginary infallibility of a priest.

Others, however, linger hopefully around the idea of an infallible church. They believe in the judgment of general councils, and hope there to find the rock of certainty. Apparently this is more easy, for in the multitude of counselors there is wisdom, but in reality it is quite as preposterous. For if you mass together a number of men, each one of whom is fallible, it is clear that you are no nearer infallibility. It is quite as easy to believe that *one* man is inspired as that five or six hundred are so.

The fact is that churches have made mistakes as well as individual men, and have fallen into grievous errors both in practice and doctrine.

Look at the churches of Galatia, Corinth, Laodicea, Sardis and so on. Nay, we find that the first disciples of our Lord, who made up the truly primitive and apostolic church, were not infallible, they made a great mistake about a simple saying of our Lord. He said concerning John, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” “Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?”

Even the apostles themselves could blunder and did blunder. They were infallible in what they wrote when they were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but at no other time.

Yet, brethren, I marvel not that in the sore distress to which the mind is often brought, it has found it better to believe in an infallible church than to be left to mere reason, or to be tossed to and fro, a desolate waif, driven by ever changeful winds over the awful leagues of questions which are found in the restless ocean of unbelief. Longing as I do for a sure foundation, and rejecting both popes and councils, where shall I look?

We have a more sure word of testimony, a rock of truth upon which we rest, for our infallible standard lies in, “It is written.” The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is our religion. Of this inspired Book we say—

*“This is the judge that ends the strife
When wit and reason fail.”*

It is said that it is hard to be understood, but it is not so to those who seek the guidance of the Spirit of God. There are in it great truths which are above our comprehension, placed there on purpose to let us see how shallow are our finite minds, but concerning vital and fundamental points the Bible is not hard to be understood, neither is there any excuse for the multitudes of errors which men pretend to have gathered from it.

A babe in grace taught by the Spirit of God may know the mind of the Lord concerning salvation, and find its way to heaven by the guidance of the word alone. But be it profound or simple, that is not the question, it is the word of God, and is pure, unerring truth. Here is infallibility, and nowhere else.

I wish to speak this morning upon this grand, infallible Book, which is our sole court of appeal. And I desire to speak especially to the young converts who during the last few days have found the Savior, for by them this Book must be used as the sword of the Spirit in the spiritual conflicts which await them. I would zealously exhort them to take to themselves this part of the whole armor of God that they may be able to resist the great enemy of their souls.

“It is written.” I shall commend this unfailing weapon to the use of our young soldiers by noting that *this is our Champion’s own weapon*. Secondly, I shall urge them to note *to what uses He turned this weapon*. And thirdly, we shall watch Him to see *how He handled it*.

I. I commend to every Christian here the constant use of the infallible word because IT WAS OUR CHAMPION’S CHOSEN WEAPON when He was assailed by Satan in the wilderness.

He had a great choice of weapons with which to fight with Satan, but He took none but this Sword of the Spirit—“It is written.” Our Lord might have overcome Satan by angelic force. He had only to pray to His Father and He would presently have sent Him twelve legions of angels, against whose mighty rush the arch-fiend could not have stood for a single moment.

If our Lord had but exercised His Godhead, a single word would have sent the tempter back to his infernal den. But instead of power angelic or divine, He used, “It is written,” thus teaching His church that she is never to call in the aid of force, or use carnal weapons, but must trust alone in the omnipotence which dwells in the sure word of testimony.

This is our battle-ax and weapon of war. The patronages or the constraints of civil power are not for us. Neither dare we use either bribes or threats to make men Christians, a spiritual kingdom must be set up and supported by spiritual means only.

Our Lord might have defeated the tempter by unveiling His own glory. The brightness of the divine majesty was hidden within the humility of His manhood, and if He had lifted the veil for a moment the fiend would have been as utterly confounded as bats and owls when the sun blazes in their faces. But Jesus deigned to conceal His excellent majesty and only to defend Himself with, “It is written.”

Our Master might also have assailed Satan with rhetoric and logic. Why did He not discuss the points with him as they arose? Here were three different propositions to be discussed, but our Lord confined Himself to the one argument, “It is written.”

Now, beloved, if our Lord and Master, with all the choice of weapons which He might have had, nevertheless selected this true Jerusalem blade of the Word of God, let us not hesitate for a moment, but grasp and hold fast this one, only weapon of the saints in all times. Cast away the wooden sword of carnal reasoning, trust not in human eloquence, but arm yourselves with the solemn declarations of God, who cannot lie, and you need not fear Satan and all his hosts. Jesus, we may be sure, selected the best weapon. What was best for Him is best for you.

This weapon, it is to be noted, our Lord *used at the outset of His career*. He had not yet come into the public ministry, but if I may use the expression, while His young hand was yet untried in public warfare, He grasped at once the weapon ready forged for Him, and boldly said, “It is written.”

You young Christians lately converted have probably already been tempted, or ere long you will be, for I remember that the very first week after I found the Savior I was subjected to a very furious spiritual temptation, and I should not wonder if the like happens to you. Now, I charge you, do as Jesus did and grasp firmly—“It is written.”

It is the child’s weapon as truly as it is the defense of the strong man. If a believer were as tall as Goliath of Gath, he need have no better sword than this, and if he be a mere pigmy in the things of God, this sword will equally befit his hand and be equally effectual for offense or defense.

What a mercy it is for you, young Christian, that you have not to argue but to believe, not to invent but to accept. You have only to turn over your Bibles, find a text, and hurl that at Satan, like a stone from David’s sling and you will win the battle. “It is written,” and what is written is infallible, here is your strength in argument.

“It is written.” God has said it, that is enough. O blessed sword and shield which the little child can use to purpose, fit for the illiterate and simple-hearted, giving might to the feeble-minded and conquest to the weak.

Note next, that as Christ chose this weapon out of all others, and used it in His earliest conflict, so too, *He used it when no man was near*. The value of Holy Scripture is not alone seen in public teaching or striving for the truth, its still small voice is equally powerful when the servant of the Lord is enduring personal trial in the lonely wilderness.

The severest struggles of a true Christian are usually unknown to any but himself. Not in the family do we meet the most subtle temptations, but in the closet. Not in the shop so much as in the recesses of our own spirit do we wrestle with principalities and powers. For these dread duels, “It is written,” is the best sword and shield.

Scripture to convince another man is good, but Scripture is most required to console, defend, and sanctify our own soul. You must know how to use the Bible alone, and understand how to meet the subtlest of foes with it. For there is a real and personal devil, as most Christians know by experience, for they have stood foot to foot with him and known his keen suggestions, horrible insinuations, blasphemous assertions, and fiendish accusations. We have been assailed by thoughts which came from a mind more vigorous, more experienced, and more subtle than our own, and for these there is but one defense—the infallible, “It is written.”

Conflicts have taken place full many a time between God's servants and Satan which are more notable in the unpublished annals of the sacred history which the Lord record, than the bravest deeds of ancient heroes whom men praise in their national songs. He is not the only conqueror who is saluted with blast of trumpet, and whose statue stands in the public square. There are victors who have fought with angels and prevailed, whose prowess even Lucifer must grimly own. These all ascribe their victories to the grace which taught them how to use the infallible Word of the Lord.

Dear friend, you must have "It is written," ready by your side at all times. Some, when a spiritual conflict begins, run to a friend for help. I do not condemn the practice, but it would be much better if they turned to the Lord and His sure promises.

Some, at the first onslaught are ready to give up all hope. Do not act in so dastardly a manner, seek grace to play the man. You must fight if you are to enter into heaven. Look to your weapon, it cannot bend or grow blunt, wield it boldly and plunge it into the heart of your enemy. "It is written" will cut through soul and spirit, and wound the old dragon, himself.

Note, that *our Lord used this weapon under the most trying circumstances*, but He found it to be sufficient for His need. He was alone. No disciple was there to sympathize, but the Word was the man of his right hand, the Scripture communed with Him. He was hungry, for He had fasted forty days and nights, and hunger is a sharp pain, and oftentimes the spirits sink when the body is in need of food. Yet "It is written" held the wolf of hunger at bay. The Word fed the Champion with such meat as not only removed all faintness, but made Him mighty in spirit.

He was placed by his adversary in a position of great danger, high on the pinnacle of the lofty house of the Lord, yet there He stood and needed no surer foothold than that which the promises of the Lord supplied Him. "It is written," enabled Him to look down from the dizzy height and baffle the tempter still.

He was placed also where the kingdoms of the world were stretched beneath His feet, a matchless panorama which has full often dazzled great men's eyes and driven them onward to destruction. But "It is written" swept aside the snares of ambition and laughed at the fascination of power. Or in the desert, or on the temple, or on an exceedingly high mountain, no change in His mode of warfare was required, the infallible "It is written," availed in every position in which He found Himself, and so shall it be with us.

Earnestly do I commend the Word of God to you who have lately enlisted beneath the banner of my Lord. As David said of Goliath's sword, "there is none like it," even so say I of the Holy Scriptures. Our Lord was tempted in all points like as we are, and therein He sympathizes with us, but He resisted the temptations, and therein He is our example. We must follow Him fully if we would share His triumphs.

Observe that our Savior *continued to use His one defense*, although His adversary frequently shifted his point of attack. Error has many forms, truth is one. The devil tempted Him to distrust, but that dart was caught upon the shield of "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live."

The enemy aimed a blow at Him from the side of presumption, tempting Him to cast Himself down from the temple. But how terribly did that two-edged sword fall down upon the head of the fiend, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

The next impudent blow was leveled at our Lord with the intent of bringing Him to His knee—"Fall down and worship me." But it was met and returned with crushing force by—"It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." This smote leviathan to the heart.

This weapon is good at all points, good for defense, and for attack, to guard our whole manhood or to strike through the joints and marrow of the foe. Like the seraph's sword at Eden's gate, it turns every way. You cannot be in a condition which the Word of God has not provided for. It has as many faces and eyes as providence itself. You will find it unfailing in all periods of your life, in all circumstances, in all companies, in all trials, and under all difficulties. Were it fallible it would be useless in emergencies, but its unerring truth renders it precious beyond all price to the soldiers of the cross.

I commend to you, then, the hiding of God's Word in your heart, the pondering of it in your minds. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Be rooted and grounded, and stablished in its teaching, and saturated with its spirit. To me it is an intense joy to search diligently in my Father's Book of grace. It grows upon me daily.

It was written by inspiration in old times, but I have found while feeding upon it, that not only *was* it inspired when written, but it is so still. It is not a mere historic document, it is a letter fresh from the pen of God to me. It is not a sermon once delivered and ended, it speaks still. It is not a flower dried and put by in the *hortus siccus*, with its beauty clouded and its perfume evaporated, but it is a fresh blooming flower in God's garden, as fragrant and as fair as when He planted it.

I look not upon the Scriptures as a harp which once was played by skillful fingers and is now hung up as a memorial upon the wall. No, it is an instrument of ten strings still in the minstrel's hand, still filling the temple of the Lord with divine music, which those who have ears to hear delight to listen to.

Holy Scripture is an Eolian harp, through which the blessed wind of the Spirit is always sweeping and creating mystic music, such as no man's ears shall hear elsewhere, nor hear even there indeed, unless they have been opened by the healing touch of the Great Physician. The Holy Spirit is in the Word, and it is, therefore, living truth. O Christians, be ye sure of this, and because of it make you the Word your chosen weapon of war.

II. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us TO WHAT USES TO PUT THIS "IT IS WRITTEN."

Notice first that He used it to *defend His sonship*. The fiend said, "If thou be the Son of God," and Jesus replied, "It is written." That was the only answer He deigned to give. He did not call to mind evidences to prove His Sonship. He did not even mention that voice out of the excellent glory which had said, "This is my beloved Son." No, but "It is written."

Now, my dear young brother, converted but newly, I do not doubt but that you have been already subjected to that infernal "if." Oh, how glibly it comes from Satan's lip. It is his darling word, the favorite arrow of his quiver. He is the prince of skeptics, and they worship him while he laughs in his sleeve at them, for he believes and trembles.

One of his greatest works of mischief is to make men doubt. "If"—with what a sneer he whispers this already in the ear of the newly-converted. "If," says he—"if." "You say you are justified and pardoned, and accepted, but *if!* "May you not after all be deceived?" Now, dear friends, I beseech you never let Satan get you away from the solid ground of the Word of God. If he once gets you to think that the fact of Christ being the Savior of sinners can only be proved by what you can see within yourself he will very soon plunge you into despair.

The reason why I am to believe in Jesus, lies in Jesus and not in me. I am not to say, "I believe in the Lord Jesus because I feel so happy," for within half an hour I may feel miserable. But believe in Christ for salvation because it is written, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." I believe in the salvation provided by Jesus Christ, not because it comports with my reason or suits my frame of mind, but because it is written, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath everlasting life." Nothing can alter this truth, it stands, and must stand forever.

Believer, abide by it, come what may. Satan will tell you, "You know there are many evidences, can you produce them?" Tell him to mind his own business. He will say to you, "You know how imperfectly you have behaved, even since your conversion." Tell him that he is not so wonderfully perfect that he can afford to find fault with you.

If he says, "Ah, but if you were really a changed character you would not have those thoughts and feelings." Argue not at all with him, but dwell upon the fact that it is written, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." If you believe in Him, you cannot perish, but you have everlasting life, for so it is written.

"It is written," stand you there, and if the devil were fifty devils in one, he could not overcome you. On the other hand, if you leave "It is written," Satan knows more about reasoning than you do, he is far

older, has studied mankind very thoroughly and knows all our sore points, therefore the contest will be an unequal one. Do not argue with him, but wave in his face the banner “It is written.”

Satan cannot endure the infallible truth, for it is death to the falsehood of which he is the father. So long as God’s Word is true, the believer is safe. If that is overthrown our hope is lost, but blessed be God, not till then. Flee ye to your stronghold, ye tempted ones.

Our Lord next used the Scripture *to defeat temptation*. He was tempted to distrust. There lay stones at His feet, for all the world like loaves. There was no bread and He was hungry. And distrust said, “God has left You, You will starve. Therefore leave off being a Servant, become a Master, and command that these stones be made bread.” Jesus, however, met the temptation to provide distrustfully for Himself by saying, “It is written.”

Now, young Christians or old Christians, you may be placed by providence where you think you will be in want, and then if you are afraid that God will not provide for you, the dark suggestion will arise, “I will deal after the way of the unjust, and so put myself in comfortable circumstances.” True, the action would be wrong, but many would do it, and therefore Satan whispers, “Necessity has no law. Take the opportunity now before you.” In such an hour foil the foe with “It is written, thou shalt not steal.”

We are bidden never to go beyond or defraud our neighbor. It is written, “Trust in the LORD and do good, so shall you dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” It is written, “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” In that way only can you safely meet the temptation to distrust.

Then Satan tempted the Lord to presumption. “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down,” said he. But Christ had a Scripture ready to parry his thrust. Many are tempted to presume. “You are one of God’s elect, you cannot perish. You may therefore go into sin. You have no need to be so very careful, since you cannot fall finally and fatally”—so Satan whispers, and it is not always that the uninstructed convert is ready to answer the base sophistry.

If we are at any time tempted to yield to such specious special pleadings, let us remember it is written, “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” It is written, “Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” It is written, “Be ye holy, for I am holy. Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Begone, Satan, we dare not sin because of the mercy of God, that were indeed a diabolical return for His goodness. We abhor the idea of sinning that grace might abound.

Then Satan will attack us with the temptation to be traitors to our God and to worship other gods. “Worship me,” says he, “and if you do this your reward shall be great.” He sets before us some earthly object which he would have us idolize, some selfish aim which he would have us pursue. At that time our only defense is the sure Word, “It is written, Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength.” “Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price.” “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” “Little children keep yourselves from idols.” Quoting such words as those with all our hearts, we shall not be suffered to fall.

Beloved, we must keep from sin. If Christ has indeed saved us from sin, we cannot bear the thought of falling into it. If any of you can take delight in sin, you are not the children of God. If you are the children of God you hate sin with a perfect hatred, and your very soul loathes it. To keep you from sin, arm yourselves with this most holy and pure Word of God, which shall cleanse your way and make your heart obedient to the voice of the thrice-holy God.

Next our Lord used the word as *a direction to His way*. This is a very important point. Too many direct their ways by what they call providences. They do wrong things and they say, “It seemed such a providence.” I wonder whether Jonah, when he went down to Joppa to flee to Tarshish, considered it a providence that a ship was about to sail. If so, he was like too many nowadays who seek to lay their guilt upon God by declaring that they felt bound to act as they did, for providence suggested it.

Our Lord was not guided as to what He should do by the circumstances around Him. Anyone but our holy Lord would have obeyed the tempter and then have said, “I was very hungry, and I was sitting down in the wilderness, and it seemed such a providence that a spirit should find me out and courteously suggest the very thing that I needed, viz., to turn the stones into bread.”

It was a providence, but it was a testing providence. When you are tempted to do evil to relieve your necessities, say to yourself, “This providence is testing me, but by no means indicates to me what I ought to do, for my rule is, ‘It is written.’” If you make apparent providence your guide, you will make a thousand mistakes, but if you follow, “It is written” your steps will be wisely ordered.

Neither are we to make our special gifts and special privileges our guide. Christ is on the pinnacle of the temple, and it is possible, nay, it is certain, that if He had chosen to cast Himself down, He could have safely done so. But He did not make His special privileges a reason for presumption.

It is true that the saints shall be kept, final perseverance I believe to be undoubtedly the teaching of God’s Word, but I am not to presume upon a doctrine, I am to obey the precept. For a man to say, “I am a child of God, I am safe, therefore I live as I like,” would be to prove that he is no child of God at all, for the children of God do not turn the grace of God into licentiousness.

It were only according to the devil’s logic to say, “I am favored more than others, and therefore I may provoke the Lord more than they.” “It is written we love Him because He first loved us, and by this we know that we love God, if we keep His commandments.”

Then Satan tried to make his own personal advantage our Lord’s guide. “All these things will I give thee,” said he, but Christ did not order His acts for His own personal advantage, but replied, “It is written.”

How often have I heard people say, “I do not like to remain in a church with which I do not agree, but my usefulness would be quite gone if I were to leave it.” On this system, if our Lord had been a mere man, He might have said, “If I fall down and perform this small act of ritualism I shall have a noble sphere of usefulness. All the kingdoms of the earth will be mine! There are all those poor oppressed slaves. I could set them free! The hungry and the thirsty, how I could supply their wants, and with me for a King the earth would be happy. Indeed, that is the very thing I am about to die for, and if it is to be done so easily, and in an trice, by bowing the knee before this spirit, why not do it?”

Far, far removed was our Lord from the wicked spirit of compromise. Alas, too many now say, “We must give and take in little points. It is of no use to stand out and to be so absurdly wedded to your own ideas. There is nothing like yielding a little to carry your point in greater things.” Thus many talk, nowadays, but not so spoke our Lord. Though the whole world would be at His disposal if He did but once bow His head before the fiend, He would not do it. “It is written” was His guide, not His usefulness or personal advantage.

My dear brother, it will sometimes happen that to do the right thing will appear to be most disastrous. It will shipwreck your fortune and bring you into trouble, but I charge you do the right thing at any cost. Instead of your being honored and respected, and accounted a leader in the Christian church, you will be regarded as eccentric and bigoted, if you speak straight out. But speak straight out, and never mind what comes of it. You and I have nothing to do with what becomes of us, or our reputations, or with what becomes of the world, or becomes of heaven itself.

Our one business is to do our Father’s will. “It is written” is to be our rule, and with dogged obstinacy, as men call it, but with resolute consecration, as God esteems it, through the mire and through the slough, through the flood and through the flame, follow Jesus and the Word infallible. Follow the written Word wholly, and never mar the perfection of your obedience to Him on account of usefulness, or any other petty plea which Satan would put in your way.

Note, further, that our Lord used “It is written” for *maintaining His own Spirit*. I love to think of the calmness of Christ. He is not one whit flurried. He is hungry and He is told to create bread, and He answers, “It is written.” He is lifted to the temple’s summit, but He says, “It is written,” just as calmly as

you or I might do sitting in an easy chair. There He is with the whole world beneath His feet, gazing on its splendor, but He is not dazzled. “It is written” is still His quiet answer.

Nothing makes a man self-contained, cool, and equal to every emergency like always falling back upon the infallible Book and remembering the declaration of JEHOVAH, who cannot lie. I charge you, brethren, see to this.

The last thought on this point is that our Lord teaches us that the use of Scripture is *to vanquish the enemy and chase him away*. “Go,” said He to the fiend, “for it is written.” You too shall chase away temptation if you keep firmly to this. “God hath said it, God hath promised it. God that cannot lie, whose very Word of grace is strong as that which built the skies.”

III. As our Lord chose the weapon, and taught us its uses, SO HE SHOWED US HOW TO HANDLE IT.

How are we to handle this Sword of “It is written”? First, *with deepest reverence*. Let every word that God has spoken be law and Gospel to you. Never trifle with it, never try to evade its force or to change its meaning. God speaks to you in this Book as much as if again He came to the top of Sinai and lifted up His voice in thunder. I like to open the Bible and to pray, “Lord God, let the words leap out of the page into my soul, Thyself making them vivid, quick, powerful, and fresh to my heart.”

Our Lord Himself felt the power of the Word. It was not so much the devil who felt the power of “It is written” as Christ Himself. “No,” saith He, “I will not command stones to be made bread. I trust in God who can without bread sustain Me. I will not cast Myself down from the temple. I will not tempt the Lord My God. I will not worship Satan, for God alone is God.”

The manhood of Christ felt an awe of the Word of God, and so it became a power to Him. To trifle with Scripture is to deprive yourself of its aid. Reverence it, I beseech you, and look up to God with devout gratitude for having given it to you.

Next *have it always ready*. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as soon as He was assailed had His answer prepared—“It is written.” A ready reckoner is an admirable person in a house of business, and a ready textuary is a most useful person in the house of God. Have the Scriptures at your finger’s end. Better still, have them in the center of your heart.

It is a good thing to store the memory with many passages of the Word—the very words themselves. A Christian ought no more to make a mistake in quoting a text of Scripture than a classic does when he quotes from Virgil or Homer. The scholar likes to give the *ipsissima verba*, and so should we, for every Word is precious to us.

Our Savior knew so much of Holy Scripture that out of one single book, the book of Deuteronomy, He obtained all the texts with which He fought the wilderness battle. He had a wider range, for the Old Testament was before Him. But He kept to one book, as if to let Satan know that He was not short of ammunition. If the devil chose to continue the temptation, the Lord had abundant defense in reserve. “It is written” is an armory wherein do hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. It is not merely one, but a thousand, nay, ten thousand weapons of war. It has texts of every kind, suitable for our aid in every emergency and effectual for repelling every attack.

Brethren, study much the Word of God, and have it ready at hand. It is of no use treating the Bible as the fool did his anchor, which he had left at home when he came to be in a storm, have the infallible witness at your side when the father of lies approaches.

Endeavor also to *understand its meaning*, and so to understand it that you can discern between its meaning and its perversion. Half the mischief in the world, and perhaps more, is done, not by an ostensible lie, but by a perverted truth.

The devil, knowing this, takes a text of Scripture, clips it, adds to it, and attacks Christ with it. But our Lord did not therefore despise Scripture because the devil himself might quote it, but He answered him with a flaming text right in his face. He did not say, “The other is not written, you have altered it.” But He gave him a taste of what “It is written” really was, and so confounded him. Do you the same.

Search the Word, get the true taste of it in your mouth, and acquire discernment, so that when you say “It is written,” you may not be making a mistake. For there are some who think their creed Scriptural, and yet it is not so. Texts of Scripture out of their connection, twisted and perverted, are not “It is written.” But the plain meaning of the Word should be known and understood. Oh, read the Word, and pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit, that you may know its meaning, for so will you contend against the foe.

Brethren, *learn also to appropriate Scripture to yourselves*. One of the texts our Lord quoted He slightly altered. “Thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God.” The original text is, “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God.” But the singular lies in the plural, and it is always a blessed thing to be able to find it there. Learn so to use Scripture that you take home to yourself all its teaching, all its precepts, all its promises, all its doctrines. For bread on the table does not nourish, it is bread which you eat that will really sustain you.

When you have appropriated the texts to yourself, *stand by them whatever they may cost you*. If to give up the text would enable you to make stones into bread, do not give it up. If to reject the precept would enable you to fly through the air like a seraph, do not reject it. If to go against the Word of God would make you emperor of the entire world, do not accept the bribes. To the law and to the testimony, stand ye there.

Be a Bible man, go so far as the Bible, but not an inch beyond it. Though Calvin should beckon you, and you esteem him, or Wesley should beckon, and you esteem him, keep to the Scripture, to the Scripture only. If your minister should go astray, pray that he may be brought back again, but do not follow him. Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel than this Book teaches you, do not, I pray you, give any heed to us—no, not for a single moment. Here is the only infallibility—the Holy Ghost’s witness in this Book.

Remember, lastly, that your Lord at this time was *filled with the Spirit*. “Jesus, being filled with the Spirit,” went to be tempted. The Word of God, apart from the Spirit of God, will be of no use to you. If you cannot understand a book, do you know the best way to reach its meaning? Write to the author and ask him what he meant. If you have a book to read, and you have got that author always accessible, you need not complain that you do not understand it. The Holy Spirit is come to abide with us forever. Search the Scriptures, but cry for the Spirit’s light, and live under His influence.

So Jesus fought the old dragon, “being filled with the Spirit.” He smote leviathan through with this weapon because the Spirit of God was upon Him.

Go you with the Word of God like a two-edged sword in your hand, but ere you enter the lists pray the Holy Ghost to baptize you into Himself and so shall you overcome all your adversaries, and triumph even to the end. May God bless you, for Jesus’ sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 4

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—478, 119 (VERSION I), 262

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.