

# The Perspicuity of Scripture

A Biblical and Historical Defense of the  
Common People's Right to Search the Scriptures

Second Edition

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## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	1
<b>Part I: What Saith the Scripture?</b>	
1. Would God Hide His Word?.....	4
2. Who Did God Write His Book For?.....	6
3. Put Not Your Trust in Princes.....	9
4. Instructions for Studying God's Word.....	12
<b>Part II: The Testimony of History</b>	
5. "God's Book in Their Mother Tongue"	
The Conflict.....	16
The Reformation.....	16
6. The Preaching of Hugh Latimer	
Latimer's Conversion.....	18
Latimer's Courage.....	19
7. The Labors of William Tyndale	
The Beginning of Tyndale's Journey.....	22
Miles Coverdale.....	24
8. Tyndale's Legacy	
Tyndale and the Bible Corrector.....	26
Martyrdom.....	27
9. Modern Bible Correctors	
Deceitful Tactics.....	29
Conclusion.....	31

All Bible passages are quoted from the King James Bible, the Authorized Version of 1611.

# Foreword

**pě̄r•spi•cū'ī•ty, n.**

2. the quality of being perspicuous; freedom from obscurity or ambiguity; lucidity; as, *perspicuity* is the first excellence of writing or speaking.<sup>1</sup>

**pě̄r•spīc'ū•ous, a.**

2. clear in statement or expression; easily understood; lucid; not obscure or ambiguous; as, language is *perspicuous* when it readily presents to the reader or hearer the precise ideas which are intended to be expressed.<sup>2</sup>

The PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE was one of the foundational issues behind the Protestant Reformation and is absolutely essential to the spiritual liberty of the common Christian. “Perspicuous,” as noted above, means *clearly expressed* and *understandable*. This is simply the principle that God wrote His Book for the common people, and that common people can read and understand it for themselves.

**Mark 12:37b** *And the common people heard him gladly.*

This issue has generally been referred to as the “perspicuity of Scripture” since the days of the Reformation and still is today.<sup>3</sup> Every common Christian has equal right to open God’s Book, search the Scriptures, and seek God’s will in his own personal relationship with the Lord. Theologians and scholars do not have exclusive rights to interpreting the Bible, although many of them may claim to. It is vitally important now, just as it has been throughout history, for common Christians to understand that they can personally open God’s Word and hear directly from God, without the approval or permission of the educated “clergy.” It is true that we can learn from pastors and theologians, but as common people, we must always judge their teachings by the Word of God. God has ordained pastors and elders for roles of leadership, example, and responsibility in His churches, but they do not have any authority over our own personal convictions between us and God. God has given each one of His children spiritual liberty in their own personal walk with Him. When the Apostle Paul was warning the Galatians about the bondage of legalism, he exhorted them with these words: “YE HAVE BEEN CALLED UNTO LIBERTY.”<sup>4</sup> And our old adversary the devil has many devices to deprive us of this precious liberty.

**Gal 2:4** *And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage...*

There have always been religious leaders who make the arrogant claim that only the so-

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<sup>1</sup> *Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language*, Encyclopedic Edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> When researching this subject, one will usually find information under this particular phrase, “perspicuity of Scripture.”

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:13.

called “clergy” are qualified to interpret the Bible, and that the laity cannot understand the Bible for themselves. This Satanic lie has held the common people under religious tyranny for many generations. And in this study, we will see what the Word of God itself has to say on this issue.

**Jer 23:30** *Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbor.*

# Part I

## What Saith the Scripture?

# 1 Would God Hide His Word?

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**T**he answer to this question may seem obvious to the reader, and it certainly should be. God has a message of vital importance for the human race, concerning our eternal salvation as well as our conduct in this life. He would not be the God He claims to be if He hid His Word from the common people. Yet there are many religious leaders who teach just that. They claim that the Bible was written for the clergy and withheld from the laity. This has always been taught by the apostate Roman Catholic Church throughout its corrupt, barbaric, blood-stained history, but what is even sadder still is that Christian pastors are now adopting the same philosophy.

*No believer can read the Bible daily for himself and discover and learn the...doctrine for the Church-age...*

—quote from an evangelical Christian pastor

This issue of the perspicuity of Scripture is just as important now as during the Protestant Reformation, when thousands of our Christian brethren gave their lives for the right to read God's Word in their own language, or at any other time in history. As the Psalmist wrote, "*I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.*" And thankfully, our gracious, faithful God has given us many "exceeding great and precious promises" concerning his provision of His Word to all His children, regardless of their station in life.

**Deut 30:11-14** *For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*

**Isa 45:19** *I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.*

**Isa 48:16** *Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me.*

God specifically declares that He will speak to His people plainly and clearly.

**Deut 27:8** *And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law **very plainly**.*

**Job 33:3** *My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and **my lips shall utter knowledge clearly**.*

**Prov 8:8-9** *All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. **They are all plain to him that understandeth**, and right to them that find knowledge.*

**John 18:20** *Jesus answered him, **I spake openly to the world**; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and **in secret have I said nothing**.*

God does not make His message complicated. He does not speak to us in complex riddles.

**1 Cor 2:1** *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came **not with excellency of speech or of wisdom**, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*

**2 Cor 1:12** *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that **in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom**, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*

**2 Cor 3:12** *Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great **plainness of speech**...*

**2 Cor 11:3** *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the **simplicity that is in Christ**.*

**2 Cor 11:6** *But though I be **rude in speech**, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.*

If you had something extremely important to say to someone you dearly loved, would you make it complicated and obscure? Or would you be as clear and straightforward and *perspicuous* as possible? What foolishness it is to think that God would intentionally write His Book in language that His dear, precious children could not read and understand.

# 2 Who Did God Write His Book For?

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God instructs His people to read His Book. And this command would certainly make no sense if God had not made His Book readable.

**Eph 3:4** *Whereby, **when ye read**, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ...*

**Rev 1:3** *Blessed is **he that readeth**, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

**Matt 24:15** *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (**whoso readeth**, let him understand)...*

“Whoso readeth” can understand God’s Word. It is not “whosoever is a scholar.” Any humble, teachable child of God reading his Bible can receive the Lord’s teaching.

**Acts 17:11** *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the Scriptures daily**, whether those things were so.*

A “noble” Christian is one who searches the Scriptures for himself. But of course he could not do this if Scripture were not perspicuous to the common people.

It is very obvious in the following verses that God speaks directly to the simple, uneducated, common people.

**Psalm 119:130** *The entrance of thy words giveth light; **it giveth understanding unto the simple.***

**Matt 11:25** *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast **revealed them unto babes.***

**Acts 4:13** *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were **unlearned and ignorant men**, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

**Mark 12:37b** *And the common people heard him gladly.*

God the Holy Spirit is our Teacher, and all believers have the Holy Spirit in them. Therefore every believer has equal right to go to the Scriptures himself. We must all take responsibility before God for our own convictions, for we will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Romans 14:10).

**John 6:63** *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

**John 16:12-15** *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will **guide you into all truth**: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall **show it unto you**. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.*

**1 Cor 2:12-13** *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, **not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth**; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

These are just a few of the scriptures throughout the New Testament that describe the Spirit's ministry to the believer. And in his first epistle, the Apostle John emphatically states that men have no authority over our convictions.

**1 John 2:27** *But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye **need not that any man teach you**: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*

God has given His people teachers, but He does not give them the right to enforce their teachings and opinions on the consciences of the people. They are simply brothers in Christ who have a gift for studying and for publicly sharing what they have found in the Scriptures with their brethren. These men also provide leadership in the Body of Christ, and we should show them their due respect and honor. But the Apostle Paul also warns us against allowing others to violate our liberty of conscience: "*Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for **why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?***"<sup>5</sup>

The Apostle John shows us an example of this principle of *liberty of conscience* being violated by a man named Diotrophes, who had taken upon himself authority that God had not given him.

**3 John 1:9-10** *I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, **neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.***

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:29.



And the Apostle Peter specifically warns the teachers and elders against usurping power that does not belong to them: *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; **neither as being lords over God's heritage**, but being examples to the flock.”*<sup>6</sup> Even the apostles themselves did not coerce the people's faith. As the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, *“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”*<sup>7</sup>

Dear reader, as a child of God indwelt by His Spirit, you must understand that no man on earth has authority over your spiritual convictions. God has indeed given His Church many faithful men who diligently labor in the preaching of His Word, and we can learn many valuable lessons from them. But if we ever allow them to become our final authority, we have surrendered our spiritual liberty.

**2 Cor 3:17** *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 5:2-3.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:24.

# 3 Put Not Your Trust in Princes

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**T**he Scriptures abound with descriptions of the weakness, sinfulness, and errors of men. Worldly wisdom has no place in the plan of God. And human education and prominence are meaningless when it comes to knowing God and His Word.

**Isa 44:24a,25** *Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer...that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and **maketh their knowledge foolish**...*

**1 Cor 1:19-20** *For it is written, **I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.** Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

**1 Cor 1:27-28** *But **God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;** and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.*

Man's educational institutions cannot make anyone a true servant of God. We have already seen in Acts 4:13 that the apostles themselves were "ignorant and unlearned men." And the Pharisees could not understand how our Lord Jesus could preach such powerful messages, when He had never obtained their "educational credentials."

**John 7:14-16** *Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, **How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?** Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*

The Scriptures often remind us that we cannot put our trust in men.

**Psalm 118:8-9** *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.*

**Psalm 146:3** *Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.*

A man's fame, prominence, and scholarly learning are no guarantee of his spirituality.

**Psalm 62:9** *Surely men of low degree are vanity, and **men of high degree are a lie:** to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.*

**Job 32:9** *Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.*

**Job 32:21** *Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man.*

We must not take man's word over God's word.

**1 Cor 4:6** *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us **not to think of men above that which is written**, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*

**Isa 8:20** *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

We must beware of the evils of Nicolaitanism.<sup>8</sup>

**Rev 2:6** *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the **Nicolaitanes**, which I also hate.*

**Rev 2:15** *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the **Nicolaitanes**, which thing I hate.*

Nicolaitanism is the practice of dividing the equal brotherhood of believers into a laity and a clergy. It is the establishment of an elite clerical class as the final authority in the things of God over the common believer. The word "Nicolaitan" is a compound word derived from the Greek *nikao*, "to conquer," and *laos*, "the people" or "laity." Thus it means to "conquer the common people." It is found in its grossest form in Roman Catholicism, with its anti-scriptural hierarchy of priests, bishops, cardinals, and pope. It sets up a mediatory class between men and God in its pagan-styled priesthood. Nicolaitanism can also be found in modern Protestantism in a more subtle but still dangerous form, when a ministerial class, ordained by men with the credentials of men, lords it over the common people. When a specially-ordained class with man's credentials is given authority in spiritual matters over the common brethren, the authority of man has replaced the authority of the Word of God in believers' lives. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hates. We must therefore beware of men who elevate themselves to the point where they enforce their own views upon the common brethren (1 Corinthians 10:29, 2 Corinthians 1:24, 1 Peter 5:2-3, 3 John 1:9-10).

The intellectual speculation of men can be dangerous. There are many theologians who delight in a massive vocabulary of technical, scholarly terminology.<sup>9</sup> However, this does not mean that their teaching is trustworthy.

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<sup>8</sup> John A. Ricci and Louis E. DeBoer, *The Preeminence of Christ: The King James Bible versus the Modern Versions*, pp. 30-35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 35-38.

**1 Cor 2:4-5** *And my speech and my preaching was **not with enticing words of man's wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

**Col 2:4** *And this I say, lest any man should **beguile you with enticing words**.*

**Col 2:8** *Beware lest any man spoil you through **philosophy and vain deceit**, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

**1 Tim 6:20** *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.*

In Philippians 3, we see Paul's attitude toward his own human scholarship and accomplishments.

**Phil 3:4-8** *Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, **a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee**; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and **I count all things but loss** for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, **and do count them but dung**, that I may win Christ...*

There is no substitute for "simplicity and godly sincerity."

# 4 Instructions for Studying God's Word

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**W**e are given many commands that have to do with the condition of our heart before the Lord, if we are to gain light and understanding of His Word. You see, God will hide His Word from the educated, arrogant “wise and prudent,” and reveal it to the humble and teachable “babe.” When it comes to understanding Scripture, the Bible tells us that it is *the condition of the heart* that counts, not scholarship and education. Consider the following Scriptural principles<sup>10</sup> that give us the **keys** to understanding God’s Word:

- The **illumination of the indwelling Holy Spirit** is necessary to understand the teaching of the Bible. The Holy Spirit is our true teacher.

**John 16:13-15** *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.*

**1 Cor 2:10-12** *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

- The Holy Spirit enables us to **behold Christ**, revealed in the glass or mirror of the Word.

**2 Cor 3:18** *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

**1 Cor 2:16** *For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

- Our hearts must have an attitude of **humility** and **teachability** if we are to understand God’s Word.

**Psalms 25:9** *The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.*

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 102-107.

**2 Peter 1:8** *For if these things [Christian virtues] be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- We must have a **reverence** and **respect** for God's Word if we are to understand it.

**Psalms 25:14** *The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant.*

**Prov 15:33** *The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility.*

- We are told by the Lord Jesus Christ that we must be **willing to obey** God's Word if we are going to understand the Bible. God will not reveal more of His Word to us if we are unwilling to obey what we already have. If we have not a desire in our hearts to obey God, we cannot expect to understand the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that if we are willing to obey His Word, we will understand His doctrine.

**John 7:17** *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

**John 8:31b-32** *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

- We must have the **right priorities** in life if we want to understand God's Word. We must place the knowledge of God's Word above material pursuit. To have a "single eye" means to have a singular focus on the things of God. If our loyalty and devotion is divided between the things of this world and God, we cannot enter into a deep understanding of His Word...*for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matthew 6:21).

**Matt 6:22-24** *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

- We must be determined, consistent, **diligent** seekers of truth in order to understand the Bible. If we are casual dabblers in the Word, we will not gain a deeper understanding of the Bible. God honors the diligent seeker of truth with understanding of His Word.

**Heb 11:6** *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that **diligently** seek him.*

**Matt 7:7-8** *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

- As to the **method** we must apply in studying the Bible, we must always *compare scripture with scripture*, taking context into consideration, as well as all the passages that shed light on the subject we are studying, for no Scripture stands alone. Each passage must be studied in relation to the rest of God's revelation.

**1 Cor 2:13** *Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

**2 Peter 1:20** *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.*

- We are to diligently study so as to recognize the **proper divisions and categories** of Scripture, so that we do not misapply scriptures.

**2 Tim 2:15** *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

**Eph 3:3-5** *How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit...*

**Rom 6:14** *For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

- Above all else, we must have **faith** that believes and stands upon the words of Scripture (Hebrews 11:6).

**2 Cor 5:7** *For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

**Rom 10:17** *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Isn't it amazing how God gives us the instructions for understanding His Word right in the Bible itself? We are never told in the Bible to spend years learning at a seminary or to run off to commentaries or Greek lexicons so that we can understand God's Word. Far from it! No, God has made it clear that we can understand His Word if our hearts are in the right condition before Him.

**Luke 11:28** *But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

# Part II

## The Testimony of History



# 5 “God’s Book in Their Mother Tongue”

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## THE CONFLICT

**H**uman history is rightly called “His story.” It is the story of the conflict between our Lord Jesus Christ and Satan as foretold in Genesis.

**Gen 3:15** *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

As God’s people, we are called to glorify Him in the midst of this lost and dying world. Our old enemy the Devil is the deceiver of the world, and there is no man he cannot deceive, regardless of any human intellect, learning, authority, or power. In fact, it is often the most educated and most powerful who are the most deceived.

There is only one protection against our enemy’s deception in this world—the perfect, infallible Word of God, which our risen Savior has left in our possession, to guide us through every attack and every trap the enemy sets before us. Therefore, at the heart of this ongoing conflict are God’s gracious provision of His Word to His people, and all the efforts of our enemy to take it away from us. It is a story of God faithfully preserving and protecting His precious Book, and the evil devices of our enemy to corrupt it and destroy it. There is nothing in this world that Satan fears except for the Word of God, and his efforts to separate God’s people from God’s Book have been relentless. He has never ceased in his attacks against God’s Book; his agenda has simply taken on different forms as the centuries have passed. As Solomon declared, “there is no new thing under the sun.”

**Eccl 1:9** *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.*

## THE REFORMATION

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, a widespread rebellion broke out in Europe against the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church, as God’s people claimed the right to read the Bible in their own language. This great battle for the faith is known as the Protestant Reformation. Thousands of faithful Christians became martyrs for the Lord Jesus Christ across the continent of Europe and in England. In their religious pride and vanity, the Catholic priests forbade the people to have their own Bibles and suppressed the circulation of the Scriptures in English. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Christian historian Merle Daubigné describes a meeting of English prelates (high-ranking clergymen) on November 29, 1529:

“It is impossible to translate the Scripture into English,” said one of the prelates. “It is not lawful for the laity to read it in their mother tongue,” said another. “If you tolerate the

Bible,” added a third, “you will make us all heretics.” “By circulating the Scriptures,” exclaimed several, “you will raise up the nation against the king.”<sup>11</sup>

**2 Peter 2:18-19** *For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

The Romanist clergy enforced their tyranny in the most brutal and barbaric ways imaginable. And this is vividly illustrated in the touching story of the Christian martyr James Bainham.

In December 1531, James Bainham was arrested for possessing Scriptures in the English language and for holding heretical views. In an attempt to persuade him to accuse others, he was mercilessly tortured on the rack until he was lamed. His wife, refusing to reveal the location of the suspected books, was cast into Fleet Prison, and all their worldly goods were confiscated.

Five months later, on May 1, 1532, the faithful old Christian Bainham was burned at the stake. Addressing the crowd just before the lighting of the fire, he exclaimed: “I come hither, good people! Accused and condemned for an heretic... And these be the articles that I die for, which be a very truth, and grounded on God’s Word, and no heresy. They be these: First, I say it is lawful for every man and woman, to have *God’s book in their mother tongue...*”

Bainham died, according to his own statement, even when half consumed in the flames, without any pain.<sup>12</sup>

As brother Bainham was about to die in the flames for his love for his Savior, he boldly declared that the first principle he was giving his life for, was that God’s people had the right to have the Bible for themselves, and to have it in their own language. Our brothers and sisters from centuries ago were willing to die for the right to have “God’s Book in their mother tongue.” As Christians, we must never give up this right.

**Gal 5:1** *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

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<sup>11</sup> J. H. Merle Daubigné, *History of the Reformation in England*, Vol. 1, Book 4, Chapter 15.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Anderson, *Annals of the English Bible*, p. 334.

# 6 The Preaching of Hugh Latimer

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## LATIMER'S CONVERSION

A story well worthy of our attention took place in Cambridge, England in 1524. Hugh Latimer was a fanatical Catholic priest who was converted by the witness of a faithful man of God named Thomas Bilney. And both of these men would later die gloriously as martyrs, in the midst of this pivotal period of human history. The accounts of their lives given by Merle Daubigné in his *History of the Reformation in England* is quite inspiring, and rather than attempt to improve on Mr. Daubigné's efforts, I will simply quote what he has written, in a somewhat abridged form.<sup>13</sup>

A society of Christians had been formed at Cambridge, of which [Thomas] Bilney was the center. ... He desired to draw to the knowledge of God, all who came nigh him; and by degrees, the rays of the gospel sun, which was then rising in the firmament of Christendom, pierced the ancient windows of the colleges, and illuminated the solitary chambers of certain of the masters and fellows. Master Thomas Arthur, Master Thistle of Pembroke Hall, and Master Stafford were among the first to join Bilney. George Stafford, professor of divinity, was a man of deep learning and holy life, clear and precise in his teaching. He was admired by everyone in Cambridge, so that his conversion, like that of his friends, spread alarm among the partisans of the schoolmen. But a conversion still more striking than this was destined to give the English Reformation a champion more illustrious than either Stafford or Bilney.

There was in Cambridge, at that time, a priest notorious for his ardent fanaticism. In the processions, amidst the pomp, prayers, and chanting of the train, none could fail to notice a master of arts, about thirty years of age, who, with erect head, carried proudly the university cross. Hugh Latimer, for such was his name, combined a biting humor with an impetuous disposition and indefatigable zeal, and was very quick in ridiculing the faults of his adversaries. There was more wit and raillery in his fanaticism than can often be found in such characters. He followed the friends of the Word of God into the colleges and houses where they used to meet, debated with them, and pressed them to abandon their faith. He was a second Saul, and was soon to resemble the apostle of the Gentiles in another respect. ...

"I was then," said he, "as obstinate a papist as any in England."

Bilney easily detected Latimer's sophisms<sup>14</sup>, but at the same time loved his person, and conceived the design of winning him to the gospel. But how to manage it? The prejudiced Latimer would not even listen to the evangelical Bilney. The latter [Bilney] reflected, prayed, and at last planned a very candid and very strange plot, which led to one of the most astonishing conversions recorded in history.

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<sup>13</sup> J. H. Merle Daubigné, *History of the Reformation in England*, Vol. 1, Book 2, Chapter 8.

<sup>14</sup> Deceptive argumentations.

He went to the college where Latimer resided. “For the love of God,” he said to him, “be pleased to hear my confession.” The “heretic” [Bilney] prayed to make confession to the Catholic—what a singular fact! ... The ardent Latimer eagerly yielded to Bilney’s request, and the latter, kneeling before the cross bearer [Latimer], related to him with touching simplicity the anguish he had once felt in his soul, the efforts he had made to remove it, their unprofitableness so long as he determined to follow the precepts of the [Catholic] church and, lastly, the peace he had felt when he believed that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He described to Latimer the spirit of adoption he had received, and the happiness he experienced in being able now to call God his Father. ... Latimer, who expected to receive a confession, listened without mistrust. His heart was opened, and the voice of the pious Bilney penetrated it without obstacle. ... His language, at once so simple and so lively, entered like a two-edged sword. ...

At length grace prevailed; the penitent [Bilney] rose up, but Latimer remained seated, absorbed in thought. ... Like Saul on the way to Damascus, he was conquered, and his conversion, like the apostle’s, was instantaneous. He stammered out a few words; Bilney drew near him with love, and God scattered the darkness which still obscured his mind. He saw Jesus Christ as the only Savior given to man; he contemplated and adored Him. “I learnt more by this confession,” he said afterwards, “than in many years before. From that time forward I began to smell the word of God, and forsook the doctors of the schools and such fooleries.” ... Latimer viewed with horror the obstinate war he had waged against God; he wept bitterly, but Bilney consoled him. “Brother,” said he, “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” These two young men, then locked in their solitary chamber at Cambridge, were one day to mount the scaffold [as martyrs] for that divine Master whose spirit was teaching them.

Brother Bilney’s approach was certainly far from orthodox, and perhaps should not be followed on all occasions, yet the Lord blessed his fervent testimony to the Gospel and his determination to win souls to Jesus Christ. And his new Christian brother, Hugh Latimer, would become a champion of God’s oppressed people in England.

## LATIMER’S COURAGE

Let us continue brother Latimer’s story with Mr. Daubigné,<sup>15</sup> as we see him boldly challenging the corrupt popish priests.

The priests could not remain inactive; they heard speak of grace and liberty, and would have nothing to do with either. If *grace* is tolerated, will it not take from the hands of the clergy the manipulation of salvation, indulgences, penance, and all the rubrics of the canon law? If *liberty* is conceded, will not the hierarchy, with all its degrees, poms, violence, and scaffolds, be shaken?

The priests were well aware that if the common people discovered the grace and liberty proclaimed in the Word of God, their whole religious system and their power over the people would collapse.

The friends of popery, therefore, collected their forces to oppose the new religion. ... Meetings were held in the convents, but particularly in that belonging to the Greyfriars.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. 1, Book 2, Chapter 11.

They mustered all their forces. *An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*, said they. Latimer extols in his sermons the *blessings* of Scripture; we must deliver a sermon also to show its *dangers*. ...

As Latimer is showing the people what a precious *blessing* God's Word is, the popish priests are out to convince the people that it is actually *dangerous* for them to read the Bible.

Among the Dominicans there was a friar, adroit and skillful in little matters; it was the prior Bockenham. No one had shown more hatred against the evangelical Christians, and no one was in truth a greater stranger to the gospel. This was the man commissioned to set forth the "dangers" of the Word of God.

He was by no means familiar with the New Testament; he opened it however, picked out a few passages here and there which seemed to favor his thesis, and then, arrayed in his costliest robes, with head erect and solemn step, already sure of victory, he went into the pulpit, combated the heretic [Latimer], and with pompous voice stormed against the reading of the Bible; it was in his eyes the fountain of all heresies and misfortunes.

"Scripture," he said, "is full of figurative language which the laity will be certain to misinterpret to their own ruin. If that heresy should prevail," he exclaimed, "there will be an end of everything useful among us. The ploughman, reading in the gospel that *no man having put his hand to the plough should look back*, would soon lay aside his labor. ... The baker, reading that *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*, will in future make us nothing but very insipid bread; and the simple man finding himself commanded to *pluck out the right eye and cast it from thee*, England, after a few years, will be a frightful spectacle; it will be little better than a nation of blind and one-eyed men, sadly begging their bread from door to door." ...

This arrogant priest, Bockenham, comes up with an absurd excuse for telling the people not to read the Bible. He claims they will not understand the simple, obvious analogies found in Scripture.

"The heretic is silenced," said the monks and clerks, but sensible people smiled, and Latimer was delighted that they had given him such an adversary. Being of a lively disposition and inclined to irony, he resolved to lash the platitudes<sup>16</sup> of the pompous friar. There are some absurdities, he thought, which can only be refuted by showing how foolish they are. ... "Next Sunday I will reply to him," said Latimer.

The church was crowded when Bockenham, with the hood of St. Francis on his shoulders and with a vainglorious air, took his place solemnly in front of the preacher. Latimer began by recapitulating the last week of his adversary's arguments; then taking them up one by one, he turned them over and over, and pointed out all their absurdity with so much wit that the poor prior was buried in his own nonsense.

Then turning towards the listening crowd, he exclaimed with warmth, "This is how your skillful guides [the clergy] abuse your understanding. They look upon you as children that must be forever kept in leading-strings. Now, the hour of your majority [adulthood] has arrived; boldly examine the Scriptures, and you will easily discover the absurdity of the teaching of your doctors."

And then desirous, as Solomon has it, of *answering a fool according to his folly*, he added, "As for the comparisons drawn from the *plough*, the *leaven*, and the *eye*, of which

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<sup>16</sup> Commonplace, predictable statements, expressed as if they were original or significant.

the reverend prior has made so singular a use, is it necessary to justify these passages of Scripture? Must I tell you what *plough*, what *leaven*, what *eye* is here meant? Is not our Lord's teaching distinguished by those expressions which, under a popular form, conceal a spiritual and profound meaning? Do not we know that in all languages and in all speeches, it is not on the *image* that we must fix our eyes, but on the *thing* which the image represents? ..."

"For instance," he continued, and as he said these words he cast a piercing glance on the prior, "if we see a [painting of a] fox...preaching in a friar's hood, nobody imagines that a fox is [literally] meant, but that craft and hypocrisy are described, which are so often found disguised in that garb."

At these words the prior [Bockenham], on whom the eyes of all the congregation were turned, rose and left the church hastily, and went off to hide his rage and confusion among his brethren. The monks and their creatures [followers] uttered loud cries against Latimer. It was unpardonable (they said) to have been thus wanting in respect to the "cowl of St. Francis." But his [Latimer's] friends replied, "Do we not whip children? and he who treats Scripture worse than a child, does he not deserve to be well flogged?"

So here we have seen a rather humorous account of the silly arguments of the tyrannical popish clergy, and a man of God easily refuting them. But there were trying times ahead for Hugh Latimer and his brethren. He would one day give his life for daring to oppose the Catholic priests, and for defending the common man's right to search the Scriptures for himself. On October 16, 1555, under the cruel reign of Queen "Bloody" Mary, he was burned at the stake with a fellow preacher, Nicholas Ridley. His dying words were these:

*Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.*

# 7 The Labors of William Tyndale

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## THE BEGINNING OF TYNDALE'S JOURNEY

William Tyndale was the man used by God to give English-speaking Christians their first printed Bible, translated from the Greek *Textus Receptus* published by Desiderius Erasmus.<sup>17</sup> We pick up Tyndale's story, with Mr. Daubigné,<sup>18</sup> as he is working as a tutor in a nobleman's house in Sodbury, England, and sits down to dinner with his employer and several clergymen...

Tyndale occupied the humblest place, and kept Erasmus' New Testament within reach in order to prove what he advanced [taught and promoted]. Numerous domestics were moving about engaged in waiting on the guests. At length, the conversation, after wandering a little, took a more precise direction. The priests grew impatient when they saw the "terrible volume" appear. "Your Scriptures only serve to make heretics," they exclaimed.

"On the contrary," replied Tyndale, "the source of all heresies is *pride*; now the Word of God strips man of everything, and leaves him as bare as *Job*."

"*The Word of God!* why even *we* don't understand it; how then can the common people understand it?"

"You do not understand it," rejoined Tyndale, "because you look into it only for foolish questions, as you would into *our Lady's Matins* or *Merlin's Prophecies*. Now the Scriptures are a clue which we must follow, without turning aside, until we arrive at Christ, for Christ is the end."

"And I tell you," shouted out a priest, "that the Scriptures are a Dædalian labyrinth, rather than Ariadne's clue—a conjuring book wherein everybody finds what he wants."

"Alas!" replied Tyndale, "you read them without Jesus Christ; that is why they are an obscure book to you, a thicket of thorns where you only escape from the briers to be caught by the brambles."

"No!" exclaimed another clerk, heedless of contradicting his colleague, "nothing is obscure to us; it is we who give the Scriptures, and we who explain them to you."

"You would lose both your time and your trouble," said Tyndale, "do you know who taught the eagles to spy out their prey? Well, that same God teaches His hungry children to spy out their Father in His Word. ... And as for you, far from having given us the Scriptures, it is you who have hidden them from us; it is you who burn those who teach them, and, if you could, you would burn the Scriptures themselves."

Tyndale was not satisfied with merely laying down the great principles of faith; he always sought after what he calls "the sweet marrow within," but to the divine unction he added no little humor, and unmercifully ridiculed the superstitions of his adversaries. "You

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<sup>17</sup> John A. Ricci and Louis E. DeBoer, *The Preeminence of Christ: The King James Bible versus the Modern Versions*, pp. 111-122, 126-130.

<sup>18</sup> J. H. Merle Daubigné, *History of the Reformation in England*, Vol. 1, Book 2, Chapter 4.

set candles before images,” he said to them, “and since you give them *light*, why don’t you give them *food*? Why don’t you make their bellies hollow, and put victuals and drink inside? To serve God by such mummeries is treating Him like a spoilt child, whom you pacify with a toy or with a horse made of a stick.”

Tyndale, like Latimer, boldly exposed the folly of the Romanist priests. And he too felt the call of God to preach His Word.

He preached every Sunday, sometimes in a village, sometimes in a town. The inhabitants of Bristol assembled to hear him in a large meadow, called St. Austin’s Green. But no sooner had he preached in any place, then the priests hastened thither, tore up what he had planted, called him a heretic, and threatened to expel from the church everyone who dared listen to him.

When Tyndale returned he found the field laid waste by the enemy, and looking sadly upon it, as the husbandman who sees his corn beaten down by the hail, and his rich furrows turned into a barren waste, he exclaimed, “What is to be done? While I am sowing in one place, the enemy ravages the field I have just left. I cannot be everywhere. Oh! if Christians possessed the Holy Scriptures in their own tongue, they could of themselves withstand these sophists. Without the Bible it is impossible to establish the laity in the truth.”

Then a great idea sprang up in Tyndale’s heart: “It was in the language of Israel,” said he, “that the Psalms were sung in the temple of Jehovah, and shall not the gospel speak the language of England among us? ... Ought the church to have less light at noonday than at the dawn? ... Christians must read the New Testament in their mother tongue.”

Tyndale realized that, just as the people of Israel had God’s word in their own mother tongue, so must the people of England. The Church in his day should have just as much access to God’s Book as it did at the beginning. And he fully understood that God’s Book must be our final, highest, unquestioned authority in all things—and that all the writings of the famous “doctors of theology” must be subservient to the Book.

“One holdeth this doctor, another that,” said Tyndale, “one followeth Duns Scotus, another St. Thomas Aquinas, another Bonaventure, Alexander of Hales, Raymond de Pennaforti, Nicholas de Lyra, Hugh de Sancto Victore, and so many others besides. ... Now, each of these authors contradicts the other. How then can we distinguish him who says right from him who says wrong? ... How? ... Verily, by God’s Word.

“Nay, say they [the clergy], the Scripture is so hard that we could not understand it but by the help of the doctors. But that is to measure the measuring rod by the cloth. Here be twenty cloths of divers lengths and of divers breadths; how shall I be sure of the length of the meteyard [yardstick] by them? I suppose, rather, I must be first sure of the length of the meteyard, and thereby measure and judge of the cloths. If I must first believe the doctor, then is the doctor first true and the truth of the Scripture is dependent on his truth, and so the truth of God springs out of the truth of man...”

As Tyndale so succinctly stated, all the opinions of “scholarly” men must be measured against the Word of God. God’s Book is the original standard—not the teachings of the scholars.

Tyndale hesitated no longer. ... The humble tutor of Sodbury undertook to place the



torch of heaven in the midst of his fellow countrymen. The translation of the Bible must be the chief work of his life.

## MILES COVERDALE

Tyndale, like Latimer, was destined to give his life for his faith. And there was another godly Christian scholar and translator whom God would use to continue Tyndale's work after his death. His name was Miles Coverdale, and he had his own confrontations with the Romanist clergy, just as Tyndale and Latimer. Merle Daubigné provides us with the following account.<sup>19</sup>

"Beware of translating the Bible!" exclaimed the partisans of the [Catholic] schoolmen, "your labor will only make divisions in the faith and in the people of God." "God has now given His church," replied Coverdale, "the gifts of translating and of printing; we must improve [make use of] them." ...

"But Scripture ought to exist in Latin only," objected the priests. "No," replied Coverdale again, "the Holy Ghost is as much the author of it in the Hebrew, Greek, French, Dutch, and English, as in Latin. ... The Word of God is of like worthiness and authority, in what language soever the Holy Ghost speaketh it." This does not mean that translations of Holy Scripture are inspired, but that the Word of God, faithfully translated, always possesses a divine authority.

Here we see a vital issue raised between Coverdale and the Catholic priests. The priests claim that God can only speak in one language. Coverdale claims that the Holy Spirit can speak in any language He chooses. This was a paramount issue of the Reformation—the authority of God's Word, as written in the *language of the common people*. (We will see more of this issue as we go on.) And Tyndale and Coverdale were determined to spread the Bible in the common tongue. It is the sacrifices and labors of faithful men like these that contributed so greatly to the eventual publishing of our precious King James Bible, the "Miracle of English Prose." In fact, we also find the original Preface<sup>20</sup> to the Authorized Version of 1611 to be very informative on this point:

But how shall men meditate in that which they cannot understand: How shall they understand that which is kept closed in an unknown tongue? As it is written, 'Except I know the power of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh, a Barbarian, and he that speaketh, shall be a Barbarian to me' [1 Corinthians 14:11]... All of us in those tongues which we do not understand, are plainly deaf; we may turn the deaf ear unto them.

Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered. Indeed without translation into the vulgar [common] tongue, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob's well (which is deep) without a bucket or something to draw with; or as that person mentioned by Isaiah, to whom when a sealed book was delivered,

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<sup>19</sup> J. H. Merle Daubigné, *History of the Reformation in England*, Vol. 1, Book 4, Chapter 2.

<sup>20</sup> The Preface to the King James Bible was written by Dr. Miles Smith and was entitled "The Translators to the Reader."

with this motion, “Read this, I pray thee,” he was fain to make this answer, “I cannot for it is sealed.”

Now what can be more available thereto, than to deliver God’s book unto God’s people in a tongue which they can understand?

A very simple, common sense point made here is that we can never understand a book that is written in a language we do not know. In languages we do not understand, we are “plainly deaf” and may “turn the deaf ear unto them.” God’s Book must be delivered unto God’s people “in a tongue which they can understand.” The tactic used by the Catholic clergy was to tell the people that the Bible could exist in only one language—Latin. If they could convince the people that it was impossible to have the Scriptures in English, then they could maintain their tyranny and power over them. Tyndale gave the following dogmatic and vivid description of the state of religion in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England and the evil of the priests:

*A thousand books had they rather to be put forth against their abominable doings and doctrine, than that the Scripture should come to light. For as long as they may keep that down, they will so darken the right way...with arguments of philosophy, and with worldly similitudes, and apparent reasons of natural wisdom; and with wresting the Scriptures unto their own purpose, clean contrary unto the process, order, and meaning of the text... Which thing only moved me to translate the New Testament. Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, **except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue**, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text: for else, whatsoever truth is taught them, these enemies of all truth quench it again.*

Whenever clergymen tell the congregation that the Scriptures can only exist in certain ancient languages, they are taking the Bible out of the hands of the common people. And this is nothing but a deceitful scam that discourages the common people from reading the Book for themselves.

# 8 Tyndale's Legacy

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## TYNDALE AND THE BIBLE CORRECTOR

Tyndale soon found that it would be impossible to complete his project in England because of the oppression of the clergy and the government: "I understood that not only was there no room in my lord of London's palace to translate the New Testament, but also there was no place to do it in all England." No English printer would dare print a forbidden Bible. Tyndale described the setting in the following words:

*Some of the papists say it is impossible to translate the Scriptures into English, some that it is not lawful for the layfolk to have it in the mother tongue, some that it would make them all heretics.*

Tyndale would have to cross the English Channel to Europe, where the fires of the Reformation were already burning bright. He left in January 1524, not knowing that he would never see his beloved England again.<sup>21</sup> His travels took him to the city of Antwerp in the Netherlands, where he would complete his English translation of the New Testament. We now return to Mr. Daubigné's history.<sup>22</sup>

In every direction people were asking for the New Testament; several Flemish printers began to reprint it, saying, "If Tyndale should print 2,000 copies, and we as many, they would be few enough for all England." Four new editions of the sacred book issued from the Antwerp presses in 1534.

There was at that time living in the city a man little fitted to be Tyndale's associate. George Joye, a fellow of Cambridge, was one of those active but superficial persons, with little learning and less judgment, who are never afraid to launch out into works beyond their powers. Joye, who had left England in 1527, noticing the consideration which Tyndale's labors brought to their author, and being also desirous of acquiring glory for himself, began, though he knew neither Hebrew nor Greek, to correct Tyndale's New Testament according to the Vulgate and his own imagination.

One day when Tyndale had refused to adopt one of his extravagant corrections, Joye was touched to the quick. "I am not afraid to cope with him in this matter," he said, "for all his high learning in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin." Tyndale knew more than these. "He is master of seven languages," said Busche<sup>23</sup>, "Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, English, French, and so thoroughly that, whichever he is speaking, one might believe it to be his mother tongue."

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<sup>21</sup> John A. Ricci and Louis E. DeBoer, *The Preeminence of Christ: The King James Bible versus the Modern Versions*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>22</sup> J. H. Merle Daubigné, *History of the Reformation in England*, Vol. 2, Book 2, Chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> A student of the German Hebrew scholar Johann Reuchlin.

In the month of August, Joye's translation appeared at Antwerp; he had advertised it as "clearer and more faithful." Tyndale glanced over the leaves of the work that had been so praised by its author, and was vexed to find himself so unskillfully "corrected."

He pointed out some of Joye's errors, and made this touching and solemn declaration: "...As concerning all I have translated, or otherwise written, I beseech all men to read it for that purpose I wrote it, even to bring them to the knowledge of the Scripture. And as far as the Scripture approveth it, so far to allow it; and if in any place the Word of God disallow it, then to refuse it, as I do before our Saviour Christ and His congregation."

Whenever faithful servants of God are being diligent in the work to which he has called them, they will always be mocked and criticized by the ignorant and foolish. And there are many George Joye's still with us today—men who cannot speak Greek or Hebrew, yet take it upon themselves to constantly "correct" the English Bible that God has given us.

**Ecc1 1:9** *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.*

## MARTYRDOM

**T**yndale endured many hardships, which time will not allow us to relate here.<sup>24</sup> In May of 1535, he was imprisoned for the "crime" of printing Bibles, and he would spend sixteen months, including a freezing winter, in a prison cell. But during this time of adversity and persecution, he could take comfort in the knowledge that his English New Testament was now in the hands of many of his countrymen.<sup>25</sup>

Doubtless, Tyndale took pleasure in his gloomy dungeon in following with his mind's eye the divine Scripture from city to city and from cottage to cottage; his imagination pictured to him the struggles it would have to go through, and also its victories. "The Word of God," he said, "never was without persecution—no more than the sun can be without his light. By what right doth the pope forbid God to speak in the English tongue?"

Tyndale imagined the future spread of the English Bible among his countrymen. And he denounced the folly of the pope who declared there could be no Bible in English—who dared to "forbid God to speak in the English tongue." This, again, was a vital principle that fueled the fire of the Protestant Reformation, a principle that James Bainham, Hugh Latimer, William Tyndale, and countless other Christians laid down their lives for—the right of the common people, not only to have God's Book, but to "have God's Book *in their mother tongue*."

"Why should not the sermons of the apostles, preached no doubt in the mother tongue of those who heard them, be now written in the mother tongue of those who read them?" Tyndale did not think of proving the divinity of the Bible by learned dissertations.

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<sup>24</sup> Merle Daubigné provides an inspiring description of Tyndale's life and labors. His complete *History of the Reformation in England* is available online at [www.americanpresbyterianchurch.org/the\\_reformation\\_in\\_england.htm](http://www.americanpresbyterianchurch.org/the_reformation_in_england.htm).

<sup>25</sup> J. H. Merle Daubigné, *History of the Reformation in England*, Vol. 2, Book 2, Chapter 14.

“Scripture derives its authority from Him who sent it,” he said. “Would you know the reason why men believe in Scripture? It is *Scripture*. It is itself the instrument which outwardly leads men to believe, whilst inwardly, the Spirit of God Himself, speaking through Scripture, gives faith to His children.”

William Tyndale, the faithful man of God now recognized in history as “the father of the English Bible,” was martyred on October 6, 1536 at Vilvoorden, Belgium. He was strangled to death, and his body was burned. His dying words were, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.”

# 9 Modern Bible Correctors

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## DECEITFUL TACTICS

**T**oday, the Church is still facing the same issues that our brethren faced at that crucial period of church history in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Roman Catholic clergy still teach the people that they cannot understand the Bible for themselves. And even conservative Christian pastors are buying into this Roman Catholic approach to Scripture. The Church is indeed facing a crisis when men can get behind Christian pulpits and make statements like this: *“No believer can read the Bible daily for himself and discover and learn the...doctrine for the Church-age...”*<sup>26</sup>

If you have not been previously exposed to this issue, you may be wondering why a Christian pastor would ever tell God’s people that they cannot understand the Bible, which of course totally discourages them from reading the Bible for themselves. Unfortunately, this is what happens when prideful, self-promoting men get behind the pulpits and try to control the congregation. The easiest way for a pastor to enforce his own views on the people is to convince them that he is the only one who can really understand the Bible, and that they need him to interpret it for them. And this is a gross abuse of the gift God has given them. Pastors are given by God to share from the Scriptures publicly with their brethren, and to provide leadership in the churches, but they are not to replace the Book as the people’s highest authority (see pages 6, 9-10).

And how does a pastor convince the people they can’t understand the Bible? A favorite tactic is to tell them that it is impossible to have God’s Word in English (does this sound familiar?), and that they need to know the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. This is a little different than the popish priests saying the Bible could only exist in Latin, but the result is the same—the common people are deceived into believing that God’s Word is hidden from them in an ancient language that they cannot understand. They must now surrender their spiritual liberty and blindly believe everything the pastor tells them.<sup>27</sup> Like the pope himself, these pastors “forbid God to speak in the English tongue.”

The typical tactic employed by this kind of pastor is to pick a Greek word from the verse he is teaching on, open his favorite Greek-English dictionary, rattle off the list of definitions for the Greek word, and substitute his own personal favorite definition. He then presents to the congregation his own personal “corrected translation.” One does not even need to be able to speak Greek in order to do this; in fact, the vast majority of these

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<sup>26</sup> Statement made by a conservative, evangelical pastor (quoted in Chapter 1).

<sup>27</sup> John A. Ricci and Louis E. DeBoer, *The Preeminence of Christ: The King James Bible versus the Modern Versions*, pp. 99-101.

pastors cannot even speak or read the Greek language. They are in no way qualified to be Bible translators.<sup>28</sup> Yet no verse of Scripture is safe from their corrective pen. The spirit of George Joye is alive and well among many current-day pastors.

This method of handling the Scriptures has become increasingly popular in recent years. Numerous Bible-correcting pastors are appearing, each one with their own personal “translations” of Bible passages. And many of them will translate the same passage differently (usually because they’re trying to make the passage line up with their own teaching). What we have today is hundreds of pastors spouting out hundreds of different “corrected translations.” Obviously, this whole state of affairs is rather chaotic and confusing, as we see more and more men producing their own personal translations of the Greek text, when they not at all qualified to do so. The congregation may actually think they’re studying from the “original languages,” but all they’re really getting is one man’s personally preferred English translation. And in most cases it is a man who is woefully unqualified to be a Bible translator (like our old friend, George Joye). When we examine their methods, we usually find that what they are doing requires little, if any, understanding of the original languages. They merely look up a Greek word in their favorite lexicon, read off the definitions (in English), and substitute their personal favorite for the word that was originally used in their English Bible. They intentionally give the people the impression that they are getting something very special and very advanced, when in reality, all they did was rattle off a list of definitions from a lexicon.

This tactic of quoting a bunch of definitions from a lexicon does not actually make the passage any clearer, and in many cases, only serves to twist the passage into closer conformity with the pastor’s own theology. These men present their own private, personal interpretation as a “corrected” or “expanded” translation of the Bible. And it is a dangerous thing to take such liberties with God’s Book. They would do well to heed the warning of Solomon.

**Prov 30:6** *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

As we have thoroughly demonstrated, the Bible itself is very clear that Scripture was written for the common people to read. Therefore, in order to convince the people they cannot read the Bible for themselves, these Bible correctors must directly contradict the Word of God. And they will often make very misleading statements to persuade the congregation to put down their Bibles. Here are a few to watch out for:

- *The common people cannot really understand the Bible on their own, and cannot learn Biblical doctrine by reading it for themselves.* This is the beginning of the pastor enforcing his power over the people.
- *God’s Word cannot be found in a translation, and can only be found in the “original languages” of Greek and Hebrew.* This, in effect, takes the Bible out of the hands of the common people, because nobody speaks ancient Greek or Hebrew anymore.
- *We need to learn a lot of extra-Biblical terminology to understand the Bible.* Many Bible-correcting pastors promote their own technical theological terms as a

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 179-185.

“necessity” for understanding the Bible (which implies that the vocabulary God used in His own Word was not good enough). This makes the people even more hopelessly dependent on the pastor.

Naturally, these pastors cannot present a single scripture to support any of these statements. And after seeing dozens of scriptures in chapters 1–4 that declare repeatedly that God has made His Word understandable to all His people, we can see the folly of their whole approach to Scripture. God has declared that He speaks openly and plainly to all, and He commands His people to read His Book and search the scriptures. These commands would be impossible to obey if God did not make His Book readable for ordinary people. If God’s Word was hidden in a language His people could not understand, then all the scriptures we have noted would make no sense.

*The Holy Ghost is as much the author of it [Scripture] in the Hebrew, Greek, French, Dutch, and English, as in Latin. ... The Word of God is of like worthiness and authority, in what language soever the Holy Ghost speaketh it.*

—Miles Coverdale

As the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:11, we must beware, “*lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*”

## CONCLUSION

Our old adversary, the Devil, has many devices to take God’s Book out of our hands. He will do anything to rob us of our time alone with God’s Book—that time when we can set aside the opinions of men and hear directly from God.

*I build on no authority, ancient or modern, but the Scripture. I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safely on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach me the Way, He hath written it down in a Book. **Oh give me that Book! At any price, give me that Book of God!** I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri [a man of one book]. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His Book; for this end, to find the way to Heaven.*

—John Wesley

Christian scholars during the Reformation used their training and abilities, and also made tremendous sacrifices, to give God’s Word to God’s people—so that their brethren could have “God’s Book in their mother tongue.” Today, so-called “Christian scholars” and pastors are using their education to take God’s Book out of the hands of God’s people.

At the Council of Trent in 1546, The Roman Catholic Church officially banned the *Textus Receptus*<sup>29</sup> and therefore its translations as well. At that time in history, Rome took the Bible from the common people by force. Today, however, many of the clergy

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<sup>29</sup> The Greek New Testament from which all the Protestant Bibles, including the King James Bible, were translated.



(both Protestant and Catholic) are taking the Bible from the common people through subtle deceit.

**Col 2:8** *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

Once we allow the “clergy” to take God’s Book out of our hands, we have lost our spiritual liberty, and we are now at the mercy of a man to tell us what to believe. Dear reader, as God’s children, we must always search the Scriptures on our own, and take responsibility for our own convictions. Let us always hold in remembrance the words of the Apostle John: *“Blessed is he that readeth.”*