



Dr. Benjamin Rush was an outspoken Christian, statesman, and pioneering medical doctor. He was a prolific author, publishing the first American chemistry textbook. In 1797, President John Adams appointed Rush as Treasurer of the U.S. Mint, a position he held until 1813. He also founded America's first Bible society. At the time of his death in 1813, he was heralded as one of the three most notable figures of America, the other two being George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. **This is one of the tracts written by Dr. Rush.**

Dear Sir:

It is now several months since I promised to give you my reasons for preferring the Bible as a schoolbook to all other compositions. Before I state my arguments, I shall assume the five following propositions:

1. That Christianity is the only true and perfect religion; and that in proportion as mankind adopt its principles and obey its precepts they will be wise and happy.
2. That a better knowledge of this religion is to be acquired by reading the Bible than in any other way.
3. That the Bible contains more knowledge necessary to man in his present state than any other book in the world.
4. That knowledge is most durable, and religious instruction most useful, when imparted in early life.
5. That the Bible, when not read in schools, is seldom read in any subsequent period of life.

My arguments in favor of the use of the Bible as a schoolbook are founded.

I. In the constitution of the human mind.

1. The memory is the first faculty which opens in the minds of children. Of how much consequence, then, must it be to impress it with the great truths of Christianity, before it is preoccupied with less interesting subjects.

2. There is a peculiar aptitude in the minds of children for religious knowledge. I have constantly found them, in the first six or seven years of their lives, more inquisitive upon religious subjects than upon any others. And an ingenious instructor of youth has informed me that he has found young children more capable of receiving just ideas upon the most difficult tenets of religion than upon the most simple branches of human knowledge. It would be strange if it were otherwise, for God creates all His means to suit His ends. There must, of course, be a fitness between the human mind and the truths which are essential to its happiness.
3. The influence of early impressions is very great upon subsequent life; and in a world where false prejudices do so much mischief, it would discover great weakness not to oppose them by such as are true. I grant that many men have rejected the impressions derived from the Bible; but how much so ever these impressions may have been despised, I believe no man was ever early instructed in the truths of the Bible without having been made wiser or better by the early operation of these impressions upon his mind. Every just principle that is to be found in the writings of Voltaire is borrowed from the Bible; and the morality of Deists, which has been so much admired and praised where it has existed, has been, I believe, in most cases, the effect of habits produced by early instruction in the principles of Christianity.
4. We are subject, by a general law of our natures, to what is called habit. Now, if the study of the Scriptures be necessary to our happiness at any time of our life, the sooner we begin to read them, the more we shall probably be attached to them; for it is peculiar to all the acts of habit, to become easy, strong, and agreeable by repetition.
5. It is a law in our natures that we remember longest the knowledge we acquire by the greatest number of our senses. Now, a knowledge of the contents of the Bible is acquired in school by the aid of the eye and the ear, for children, after getting their lessons, read or repeat them to their instructors in an audible voice; of course, there is a presumption that this knowledge will be retained much longer than if it had been acquired in any other way.
6. The interesting events and characters recorded and described in the Old and New Testaments are calculated, above all others, to seize upon all the faculties of the mind of children. The understanding, the memory, the imagination, the passions, and the moral powers are all occasionally addressed by the various

incidents which are contained in those divine books, insomuch that not to be delighted with them is to be devoid of every principle of pleasure that exists in a sound mind.

7. There is in man a native preference of truth to fiction. Lord Shaftesbury says that "truth is so congenial to our mind that we love even the shadow of it"; and Horace, in his rules for composing an epic poem, established the same law in our natures by advising that "fictions in poetry should resemble truth." Now, the Bible contains more truth than any other book in the world; so true is the testimony that it bears of God in His works of creation, providence, and redemption that it is called truth itself, by way of preeminence above other things that are acknowledged to be true. How forcibly are we struck with the evidence of truth in the history of the Jews, above what we discover in the history of other nations. Where do we find a hero or an historian record his own faults or vices except in the Old Testament? Indeed, my friend, from some accounts which I have read of the American Revolution, I begin to grown skeptical to all history except that which is contained in the Bible. Now, if this book be known to contain nothing but what is materially true, the mind will naturally acquire a love for it from this circumstance; and from this affection for the truths of the Bible, it will acquire a discernment of truth in other books, and a preference of it in all the transactions of life.
8. There is wonderful property in the memory which enables it in old age to recover the knowledge acquired in early life after it had been apparently forgotten for forty or fifty years. Of how much consequence, then, must it be to fill the mind with that species of knowledge in childhood and youth which, when recalled in the decline of life, will support the soul under the infirmities of age and smooth the avenues of approaching death. The Bible is the only book which is capable of affording this support to old age; and it is for this reason that we find it resorted to with so much diligence and pleasure by such old people as have read it in early life. I can recollect many instances of this kind in persons who discovered no special attachment to the Bible in the meridian of their days, who have, notwithstanding, spent the evening of life in reading no other book. The late Sir John Pringle, physician to the queen of Great Britain, after passing a long life in camps and at court, closed it by studying the Scriptures. So anxious was he to increase his knowledge in them that he wrote to Dr. Michaelis, a learned professor of divinity in Germany, for an explanation of a difficult text of Scripture a short time before his death.

II. My second argument in favor of the use of the Bible in schools is founded upon an implied command of God and upon the practice of several of the wisest nations of the world.

In the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, we find the following words, which are directly to my purpose: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

It appears, moreover, from the history of the Jews, that they flourished as a nation in proportion as they honored and read the books of Moses, which contained the only revelation that God had made to the world. The law was not only neglected, but lost, during the general profligacy of manner which accompanied the long and wicked reign of Manasseh. But the discovery of it amid the rubbish of the temple by Josiah and its subsequent general use were followed by a return of national virtue and prosperity. We read further of the wonderful effects which the reading of the law by Ezra, after his return from his captivity in Babylon, had upon the Jews. They showed the sincerity of their repentance by their general reformation.

The learning of the Jews, for many years, consisted in a knowledge of the Scriptures. These were the textbooks of all the instruction that was given in the schools of their Prophets. It was by means of this general knowledge of their law that those Jews who wandered from Judea into other countries carried with them and propagated certain ideas of the true God among all the civilized nations upon the face of the earth. And it was from the attachment they retained to the Old Testament that they procured a translation of it into the Greek language, after they had lost the Hebrew tongue by their long absence from their native country. The utility of this translation, commonly called the Septuagint, in facilitating the progress of the Gospel is well known to all who are acquainted with the history of the first age of the Christian church.

But the benefits of an early and general acquaintance with the Bible were not confined to the Jewish nation; they have appeared in many countries in Europe since the Reformation. The industry and habits of order which distinguish many of the German nations are derived from their early instruction in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible. In Scotland and in parts of New England, where the Bible has been long used as a schoolbook, the inhabitants are among the most enlightened in religions and science, the most strict in morals, and the most

intelligent in human affairs of any people whose history has come to my knowledge upon the surface of the globe.

I wish to be excused from repeating here that if the Bible did not convey a single direction for the attainment of future happiness, it should be read in our schools in preference to all other books from its containing the greatest portion of that kind of knowledge which is calculated to produce private and public temporal happiness.

We err, not only in human affairs but in religion likewise, only because we do not "know the Scriptures" and obey their instructions. Immense truths, I believe, are concealed in them. The time, I have no doubt, will come when posterity will view and pity our ignorance of these truths as much as we do the ignorance sometimes manifested by the disciples of our Saviour, who knew nothing of the meaning of those plain passages in the Old Testament which were daily fulfilling before their eyes.

But further, we err, not only in religion but in philosophy likewise, because we "do not know or believe the Scriptures." The sciences have been compared to a circle, of which religion composes a part. To understand any one of them perfectly, it is necessary to have some knowledge of them all. Bacon, Boyle, and Newton included the Scriptures in the inquiries to which their universal geniuses disposed them, and their philosophy was aided by their knowledge in them. A striking agreement has been lately discovered between the history of certain events recorded in the Bible and some of the operations and productions of nature, particularly those which are related in Whitehurst's observation on the deluge, in Smith's account of the origin of the variety of color in the human species, and in Bruce's travels. It remains yet to be shown how many other events related in the Bible accord with some late important discoveries in the principles of medicine. The events and the principles alluded to mutually establish the truth of each other.

I know it is said that the familiar use of the Bible in our schools has a tendency to lessen a due reverence for it. But this objection, by proving too much, proves nothing. If familiarity lessens respect for divine things, then all those precepts of our religion which enjoin the daily or weekly worship of the Deity are improper. The Bible was not intended to represent a Jewish ark; and it is an anti-Christian idea to suppose that it can be profaned by being carried into a schoolhouse, or by being handled by children.

It is also said that a great part of the Old Testament is no way interesting to mankind under the present dispensation of the Gospel. But I deny that any of the books of the Old Testament are not interesting to mankind under the Gospel

dispensation. Most of the characters, events, and ceremonies mentioned in them are personal, providential, or instituted types of the Messiah, all of which have been, or remain yet, to be fulfilled by Him. It is from an ignorance or neglect of these types that we have so many Deists in Christendom, for so irrefutably do they prove the truth of Christianity that I am sure a young man who had been regularly instructed in their meaning could never doubt afterwards of the truth of any of its principles. If any obscurity appears in these principles, it is only, to use the words of the poet, because they are dark with excessive brightness.

I know there is an objection among many people to teaching children doctrines of any kind, because they are liable to be controverted. But let us not be wiser than our Maker. If moral precepts alone could have reformed mankind, the mission of the Son of God into our world would have been unnecessary. He came to promulgate a system of doctrines, as well as a system of morals. The perfect morality of the Gospel rests upon a doctrine which, though often controverted, has never been refuted; I mean the vicarious life and death of the Son of God. This sublime and ineffable doctrine delivers us from the absurd hypothesis of modern philosophers concerning the foundation of moral obligation, and fixes it upon the eternal and self-moving principle of LOVE. It concentrates a whole system of ethics in a single text of Scripture: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you." By withholding the knowledge of this doctrine from children, we deprive ourselves of the best means of awakening moral sensibility in their minds. We do more; we furnish an argument for withholding from them a knowledge of the morality of the Gospel likewise; for this, in many instances, is as supernatural, and therefore as liable to be controverted, as any of the doctrines or miracles which are mentioned in the *New Testament*. The miraculous conception of the Saviour of the world by a virgin is not more opposed to the ordinary course of natural events, nor is the doctrine of the atonement more above human reason, than those moral precepts which command us to love our enemies or to die for our friends.

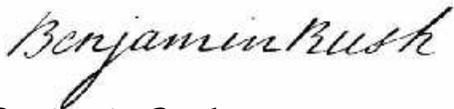
I cannot but suspect that the present fashionable practice of rejecting the Bible from our schools has originated with Deists. And they discover great ingenuity in this new mode of attacking Christianity. If they proceed in it, they will do more in half a century in extirpating our religion than Bolingbroke or Voltaire could have effected in a thousand years.

But passing by all other considerations, and contemplating merely the political institutions of the United States, I lament that we waste so much time and money in punishing crimes and take so little pains to prevent them. We profess to be

republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government; that is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible; for this divine book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and all those sober and frugal virtues which constitute the soul of republicanism.

Perhaps an apology may be necessary for my having presumed to write upon a subject so much above my ordinary studies. My excuse for it is that I thought a single mite from a member of a profession which has been frequently charged with skepticism in religion might attract the notice of persons who had often overlooked the more ample contributions, upon this subject, of gentlemen in other professions.

With great respect, I am, etc.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin Rush". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the 18th century.

Benjamin Rush