

William Huntington's High View Of Scripture

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William Huntington (1745-1813) was from a very humble background with almost no formal education yet by God's grace became one of the foremost preachers and influential pastors the United Kingdom has ever produced. He ministered to a large church in London called Providence Chapel with a congregation of almost two thousand listeners. Midweek services in a larger building drew audiences of even more.

An early biographer, Thomas Wright, called Huntington 'by far the most impressive and most famous preacher of his age' and remarked that his literary 'masterpieces' *The Bank of Faith*, *The Kingdom of Heaven Taken by Prayer* and *Contemplations on the God of Israel* have been read and treasured by millions both in the United Kingdom and in America. Huntington's 'Contemplations' together with his extensive pastoral correspondence was considered by another great admirer, J. C. Philpot, to be of the highest spiritual value.

Despite these high tributes many Christians today have never heard of William Huntington. This is largely because the doctrines Huntington preached have been spurned by more recent generations. Huntington believed in divine election, particular redemption and emphasised the need for a true spiritual work of grace in conversion.

He wrote against believers being brought under the law of Moses as their rule of life and taught, like Paul (Titus 2:11, 12), that the gospel teaches true holiness to a believer and is a sufficient rule of life (Galatians 6:16). Huntington would be aghast that so many today are called 'believers' not because they have experienced an internal act of transforming grace, but merely for following external moral codes of conduct.

In his fight against poor teaching in the churches, William Huntington stressed the need to base all doctrine on the whole of God's Word. He believed strongly that Arminianism had invaded almost every Calvinistic stronghold and brought with it an Old Testament interpretation of the believer's walk with God. This was to the detriment of the New Testament teaching of a life in the Spirit with Christ's own righteousness to guide the believer and God's own law imprinted on his heart. Writers who recognised Huntington's high position as a winnowing stone in the history of the church stressed that he was one of the very few who preached the whole

gospel from the whole Bible and could expound it in such a systematic way that each sinner and saint could see all of the steps necessary to find peace with God and live a life of holiness. Indeed it is Huntington's achievement that he took his hearers' and readers' gaze from the narrow doctrinal controversies of his age and spread before them the whole counsel of God for his whole church. This was an extremely urgent task for Huntington to perform as the churches and denominations of his days were rapidly being formed based on single doctrines, or ideas of church government, which were emphasised to the total exclusion of others.

Huntington had thus a very 'high' view of the Word of God and his eulogies of the way God has revealed his will to mankind make for the very best in Huntington's writings. His most thorough assessment of the Bible is to be found in his History of Little Faith. It is a rather lengthy passage but every word is deserving of being quoted as it is a wonderful compendium of true Christian discipline and turns the tables completely on all who wrongly charge Huntington with being an Antinomian and it shows clearly Huntington's contribution to doctrinal soundness in his role as God's winnowing. Huntington writes:

I have sometimes thought, that a nation must be truly blessed, if it were governed by no other laws than those of that blessed book. It is so complete a system, that nothing can be added to it or taken from it. It contains everything needful to be known and done. It affords a copy for a king, Deuteronomy 17:18, and a rule for a subject. It gives instruction and counsel to a senate, authority and direction for a magistrate. It cautions a witness, requires an impartial verdict of a jury, and furnishes the judge with his sentence. It sets the husband as lord of the household and the wife as mistress of the table: tells him how to rule, and her how to manage. It entails honour to parents, and enjoins obedience to children. It prescribes and limits the sway of the sovereign, the rule of the ruler, and the authority of the master, commands the subject to honour, and the servant to obey; and promises the blessing and protection of its Author to all who walk by its rules. It gives directions for weddings, and for burials: regulates feasts and fasts, mournings and rejoicings; and orders labour for the day, and rest for the night. It promises food and raiment, and limits the use of both. It points out a faithful and an eternal Guardian to the departing husband and father; tells him with whom to leave his fatherless children, and in whom his widow is to trust, Jeremiah 49:11; and promises a father to the former, and a husband to the latter. It teaches a man how to set his house in order, and how to make his will. It appoints a dowry for the wife, entails the right of the first-born, and shews how the younger branches shall be left: it defends the rights of all; and reveals vengeance to every defrauder, over-reacher, or oppressor. It is the first book, the best book and the oldest book in all the world. It contains the choicest matter, gives the best instruction, and affords the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, that ever was revealed. It contains the best laws and profoundest mysteries that ever were penned. It brings the best of tidings, and affords the best of comfort, to the inquiring, and disconsolate. It exhibits life and immortality from everlasting, and

shews the Way to eternal glory. It is a brief recital of all that is passed, and a certain prediction of all that is to come. It settles all matters in debate, resolves all doubts and eases the mind and conscience of all their scruples. It reveals the only living and true God, and shews the way to him: it sets aside all other gods, and describes the vanity of them, and of all that trust in them. In short, it is a book of law, to shew right and wrong; a book of wisdom, that condemns all folly, and makes the foolish wise; a book of truth, that detects all lies, and confutes all errors; and a book of life, that gives life, and shews the way from everlasting death. It is the most compendious book in all the world; the most ancient, authentic, and the most entertaining history, that ever was published. It contains the most ancient antiquities, strange events, wonderful occurrences, heroic deeds, unparalleled wars. It describes the celestial, terrestrial, and infernal worlds; and the origin of the angelic myriads, human tribes, and devilish legions. It will instruct the most accomplished mechanic, and the profoundest artist; it will teach the best rhetorician, and exercise every power of the most skilful arithmetician, Revelation 13:18; puzzle the wisest anatomist, and exercise the nicest critic. It corrects the vain philosopher, and confutes the wise astronomer; it exposes the subtle sophist, and makes diviners mad. It is a complete code of laws, a perfect body of divinity, an unequalled narrative, a book of lives, a book of travels, and a book of voyages. It is the best covenant that ever was agreed on, the best deed that ever was sealed, the best evidence that ever was produced, the best will that ever was made, and the best testament that ever was signed. To understand it, is to be wise indeed; to be ignorant of it, is to be destitute of wisdom. It is the king's best copy, the magistrate's best rule, the housewife's best guide, the servant's best directory, and the young man's best companion. It is the schoolboy's spelling-book, and the learned man's masterpiece. It contains a choice grammar for a novice, and a profound mystery for a sage. It is the ignorant man's dictionary, and the wise man's directory. It affords knowledge of witty inventions for the humorous, and dark sayings for the grave; and is its own interpreter. It encourages the wise, the warrior, the swift, and the overcomer; and promises an eternal reward to the excellent, the conqueror, the winner, and the prevalent. And that which crowns all is, that the Author is without partiality, and without hypocrisy; in whom is no variableness, or shadow of turning.

There is an interesting sequel to Huntington's glowing testimony to the Word of God. During the Papal Aggression of 1851, churches true to the gospel were keen to promote the Protestant faith and show the value of God's Word in face of the superstitions of the Roman Catholics. The rector of a large town in the Midlands thus looked for suitable material which he could recommend in defence of the Bible as a sure guide to salvation. After some searching, he found a piece of writing under the title *On the Excellency of the Holy Scriptures* and was so struck by the truth it proclaimed that he decided to have it circulated and recommended it

strongly from the pulpit, saying that he ‘could not inform them who was the writer, but had no doubt it was by some Eminent Divine’. What the rector did not know was soon discovered by the editor of the Stamford Mercury, who published in his newspaper ‘that the Author was a London Dissenting Minister named Huntington, once a Coalheaver, in whose works it could be seen as part of Dialogue XI, of the History of Little Faith’. The fact that this marvellous testimony to the all-sufficiency of God’s Word was penned by an ex-coalheaver and not by an ‘eminent divine’ so shocked the rector that he stopped circulating the article and forbade his flock from doing so.

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