***QUOTING THE BIBLE***

***The Poor Richard’s Almanac Version***

It’s fun to “talk Bible” around folks. For instance, I like spouting my Bible knowledge while at a party. They just roll off my tongue like melting butter. I sure impress all my friends with how I have searched the scriptures and have memorized so many verses, having them at hand at my beck and call. Yes sir, let me just rattle off a few of the many passages I have committed to memory:

“Spare the rod and spoil the child.” (Prov. 13:24)

“Money is the root of all evil.” (I Tim. 6:10)

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” (Jam. 4:7)

“Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” (2 Thess. 3:11)

“The eye is the window to the soul.” (Matt. 6:22-23)

“To thine own self be true.” (Phil. 2:3-8)

“A fool and his money are soon parted.” (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:14; 29:15)

“Charity begins at home.” (Matt. 21:31-46)

“Hate the sin, love the sinner.” (Jude 22-23)

“This too shall pass.” (Matt. 24:35)

“Moderation in all things.” (I Cor. 9:25)

“God moves in mysterious ways.” (Isa. 55:8)

“God helps those who help themselves.”

That last one is one of my favorites. It is found in Hezekiah 5:7. Let me explain it further in detail, starting with a story.

The story goes that a flood threatened a town and Joe felt sure he would be just fine. He said, “I’m a devout man, God will save me.” The waters began to rise to the foundation of his house. A neighbor comes in his four-wheeler, “Joe, come on, let’s go.” Joe says, “I’m a devout man, God will save me.” The water rose into the first floor. A policeman comes in a rowboat and says, “Joe, let’s go.” He replied, “I’m a devout man, God will save me.” The water rises to the second floor. A helicopter spots him sitting on his roof and lowers a ladder. “Joe, let’s go.” He again says, “I’m a devout man, God will save me.” Joe drowns. Before God he says, “God, why didn’t you save me?” God replies, “I sent you a four-wheeler, a lifeboat and a helicopter, why didn’t you accept them?”

That story, of course, is not in the Bible. Neither, of course, is the quotation. Nor are any of the 13 quotes above found in the Bible. Sadly, according to a Barna Research poll, 75% of actual church-goers think these sayings are in the Bible. To the stunned amazement of many, all these common quotations are man-made, not God-spoken. While the book, chapter and verse cited next to them reveal that there is at least a grain of truth in each of them, we must be careful not to fall into the trap that familiar sayings are Biblical sayings.

Mothers might like to tell their resistant children who need a bath that “*Cleanliness is next to godliness.*” Parents might hope to motivate a teenager who only wants to play video games with “*Idle hands are the devil’s workshop*.” A politician might like to bring God into policy making by saying, “Charity begins at home.” And a dietician might like to promote their weight-loss plan with “Moderation in all things.” It is bad enough to proof-text a doctrine by yanking a verse out of context (i.e. 2 Pet. 3:16). But to actually turn a non-inspired verse of wisdom into a God-breathed scripture is dangerous indeed.

Let me return to the quote: “God helps those who help themselves.” While we know now it is not a Bible verse, we must ask, is it a Biblical truth? The answer is, Yes and No.

**No.** It is not true when it comes to whether I could help myself by working out my own plan of salvation. Paul said, “*For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly… But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us… For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son*.” (Rom. 5:6-11). I was helpless to save myself. Without God Paul tells us we could not have “*life, breath, all things*” (Ac. 17:25), and in only in Him we “*live, move and have our being*” (Ac. 17:28).

**Yes.** It is true when it comes to accepting God’s terms of salvation. The same Paul also said, “*work out your own salvation in fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12). He told the Romans, twice, they must have an “*obedience of faith*” (Rom. 1:5; 16:25). God will only save those who prove they want to be saved. He will say to Joe, “I sent you apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, why didn’t you accept them?” (Eph. 4:11). When sinners in the Bible cried out, “What must we do to be saved?” they were not told “There’s nothing you can do!” Instead, they were told, “*Believe and be baptized*” (Ac. 16:29-33; cf. Mk. 16:16); and told, “*Repent and be baptized*” (Ac. 2:37-38).

The reason for this article is because I am seeing more and more people with a *Poor Richard’s Almanac* mentality to the Scriptures. You know what I mean, right? Ben Franklin published an annual Almanac and sold it throughout the 13 colonies from 1732 to 1758. He made predictions, made weather forecasts, gave practical household hints, and amused everyone with his witty sayings. “A stitch in time saves nine.” “Well done is better than well said.” “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.” And, last but not least, “God helps those who help themselves.”

Quoting the Bible… accurately, requires far more than a generic knowledge learned by the masses. To be true to the Good Book means you have a “Thus saith the Lord,” and a “It is written,” set deep in your heart, knowing both the text and the context in which God spoke it. Then, and only then, will you quote the Bible with God’s approval.

“So let it be written. So let it be done.”
 - Yul Brenner (Pharoah) Cecil B. DeMille’s 1956 movie, *The Ten Commandments*

 - Rick Lanning (Bible scholar?) 😊