

**LETTERS OF JOHN
QUINCY ADAMS TO HIS
SON, ON THE BIBLE
AND ITS TEACHINGS**

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Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings by John Quincy Adams

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J. Q. Adams

LETTERS

OF

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,

TO HIS SON,

ON

THE BIBLE AND ITS TEACHINGS.

AUBURN:

JAMES M. ALDEN.

1850.

TO THE
YOUNG MEN
OF
AMERICA
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS Respectfully
INSCRIBED.

376931

THE BIBLE AND ITS TEACHINGS.

LETTER I.

St. Petersburg, Sept., 1811.

MY DEAR SON: In your letter of the 18th January to your mother, you mentioned that you read to your aunt a chapter in the Bible or a section of Doddridge's Annotations every evening. This information gave me real pleasure; for so great is my veneration for the Bible, and so strong my belief, that when duly read and meditated on, it is of all books in the world, that which contributes most to make men good, wise, and happy—that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more steadily they pursue the prac-

tice of reading it throughout their lives, the more lively and confident will be my hopes that they will prove useful citizens to their country, respectable members of society, and a real blessing to their parents. But I hope you have now arrived at an age to understand that reading, even in the Bible, is a thing in itself, neither good nor bad, but that all the good which can be drawn from it, is by the use and improvement of what you have read, with the help of your own reflection. Young people sometimes boast of how many books, and how much they have read; when, instead of boasting, they ought to be ashamed of having wasted so much time, to so little profit.

I advise you, my son, in whatever you read, and most of all in reading the Bible, to remember that it is for the purpose of making you wiser and more virtuous. I have myself, for many years,

made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year. I have always endeavored to read it with the same spirit and temper of mind, which I now recommend to you: that is, with the intention and desire that it may contribute to my advancement in wisdom and virtue. My desire is indeed very imperfectly successful; for, like you, and like the Apostle Paul, "I find a law in my members, warring against the laws of my mind." But as I know that it is my nature to be imperfect, so I know that it is my duty to aim at perfection; and feeling and deploring my own frailties, I can only pray Almighty God, for the aid of his Spirit to strengthen my good desires, and to subdue my propensities to evil; for it is from him, that every good and every perfect gift descends. My custom is, to read four or five chapters every morning, immediately after rising from my bed. It employs

about an hour of my time, and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day. But, as other cares, duties, and occupations, engage the remainder of it, I have perhaps never a sufficient portion of my time in meditation, upon what I have read. Even meditation itself is often fruitless, unless it has some special object in view; useful thoughts often arise in the mind, and pass away without being remembered or applied to any good purpose—like the seed scattered upon the surface of the ground, which the birds devour, or the wind blows away, or which rot without taking root, however good the soil may be upon which they are cast. We are all, my dear George, unwilling to confess our own faults, even to ourselves: and when our own consciences are too honest to conceal them from us, our self-love is always busy, either in attempting to dis-