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The Bible — Is It the Word of God, or Does It Merely Contain the Word of God?

Whether the Bible is the Word of God or whether it merely *contains* the Word of God has been a matter of controversy ever since higher criticism applied its dissecting-knife to the Sacred Record. While not bold enough to discard the entire Book as a human fabrication, men held that beside some divine truths the Bible contained quite a number of human interpolations and opinions, yea, even myths, fables, errors, and contradictions. Also in our day there are those who will not regard the whole Bible as the authoritative and inerrant Word of God, whose every statement they must accept as correct and true, but maintain that it contains antiquated ideas, which were indeed regarded as true in their time but which will not stand up in the light of the superior knowledge that is ours today, and that archeological research has proved many historic references of the Bible to be wrong. Therefore, so they say, it is for us to determine what in the Bible is the Word of God and what is not.

If this contention is correct, then our faith is in the last analysis based on the opinion of those men who sit in judgment on the Bible. What they decide upon to be the Word of God in the Bible we must accept as divine truths, but what they reject as human additions we may reject likewise. But as there is no absolute agreement among these critics as to what is and what is not the Word of God in the Bible, the foundation of our faith becomes even less secure. The Bible, heretofore a sure and firm rock, on which one could take his stand in the ever-changing opinions and philosophies of men, becomes a drifting sand dune, where the human heart finds no place to rest in the assurance of knowing the truth. For if one part of the Bible is not the Word of God, why should one believe that any other part of the same Book is the Word of God? If the record of the creation is a myth, why should one believe that the Gospel of our redemption is divine truth? If these men, many of whom are called and paid by their congregations to preach to them the Word of God, would realize the havoc they work in the hearts of their hearers, how they are leading them to doubt first one part of the Bible and then another, until finally the entire book becomes doubtful to them, they would perhaps reconsider their course or, if they are honest, resign from their positions.

However, there are those who are still old-fashioned enough to believe, teach, and confess that the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God. They do so on the basis of the Scriptures' testimony concerning themselves. And this is perfectly proper. For one can-

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not prove the essence of a thing but by the thing itself; one cannot prove what the sun really is by the dying glow of a match. There is absolutely no other source material from which we can learn what the Bible is than the Bible itself, and it is sheer folly to look for information anywhere else.

Certainly, we must avail ourselves of every possible help to determine the sense of the original text; but having done so, we must not submit our findings to the adjudication of human reason or science. *Scriptura locuta, res finita*. Man may possibly err in his interpretation of a Scripture-text, but the Scriptures never err. Because God speaks to us in the Scriptures, they are not only the absolute authority and inerrant guide in all matters of faith and life, but they are true also in those references that pertain to history and nature. As distinguished from all other books in the world, this Book speaks the truth on its every page, and he that continues therein shall indeed know the truth.

Thus it is that in the whirl of doubtful, shifting, and changing opinions of men we have in the Bible that "more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place," 2 Pet. 1:19. Whoever has observed the kaleidoscopic change in human knowledge will appreciate the fact that in the Bible he has "the Word of the Lord that endureth forever," 1 Pet. 1:25, for here he has something stable, something firm, a sure foundation for his faith, an inerrant guide through life, and an unfailling assurance of a glorious hope.

It is, therefore, no small matter whether we say that the Bible contains the Word of God, or whether we say that the Bible is the Word of God. This is not merely an academic question to be discussed among theologians, but it is of practical importance and of eternal consequence to every Christian.

Nevertheless, the two propositions, The Bible *contains* the Word of God, and, The Bible *is* the Word of God, may both be accepted as correct if we define what we mean by "Word of God" and properly differentiate between revelation and inspiration.

The Bible contains the Word of God inasmuch as it contains the revelation of God. To reveal means to exhibit or to make known what was previously concealed, especially by supernatural means or agency. Not everything the holy men of God wrote in the Bible was revealed to them by God. What Moses wrote of the exodus of the children of Israel and of their wanderings in the wilderness, what we read in Joshua of the conquest of the Promised Land, the historic events recorded in Judges, Kings, Chronicles, and in parts of the Prophets, were not the subject of a divine revelation. God did not have to disclose these things to the holy writers, for they knew them from personal observation and experience or

learned of them from others. Likewise the content of many of the psalms was not, in the strict sense, revealed unto the writers, as though they had known nothing of it before. For many of them are the personal prayers and meditations of the psalmists expressed in words. Also the historic facts in the life of our Savior as we have them in the Gospels were not revealed to the writers. Matthew was one of the disciples and therefore an eye-witness of what he wrote. Mark received his information from Peter. Luke tells us that he set forth in order those things which had been delivered to them by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word, Luke 1:1-3. And John definitely declares that "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, . . . that which we have seen and heard we declare unto you," 1 John 1:1-3. Thus there are many things in the Bible which were not made known to the holy writers by divine revelation but of which they learned in some other way — by observation, by experience, by inquiry, even as we in our day acquire knowledge and information. We find in the Bible even erroneous human opinions (John 6:9), lies and blasphemies of men (Luke 22:57; Matt. 12:24), and words of Satan (Matt. 4:9). These are recorded as what they are, but are not revealed as divine truths.

On the other hand there are many things in the Bible which the holy writers could not know of themselves and which they did not learn from any human source. Thus, when the Lord had a special command or communication to make to His people, He revealed it to His prophets, who, in turn, made it known to the people, Jer. 11:1, 2. Again and again we find the statement "Thus saith the Lord," Is. 43:1; 44:2. Or when future events are foretold, which no man can know, we have a direct revelation of the Lord, Jer. 51. Thus we have in the Bible, interspersed in other matters recorded there, numerous direct revelations from God, the *ipsis-sima verba Dei*, which He made known to His prophets. But especially must we regard as the subject of divine revelation, and not as a result of human thinking, all matters that pertain to the salvation of man. No man can know what is in the heart of God. The wisest of the wise could never have discovered the truth that God will save sinners by grace through the merits of Christ. This thought is altogether unknown and foreign to the thinking of man. If such a thing was ever to happen, God had to make it known to man, He had to reveal it. Paul speaks of this in 1 Cor. 2:6-11. The promises of the Messiah, which run through the entire Old Testament, were direct revelations of God. And when Christ had come, the events of His life, His suffering, and His death were indeed witnessed by His contemporaries. But the meaning and significance of

His life's work, namely, that thereby He reconciled the world unto God, that was a matter which men could not learn from human sources but which had to be revealed to them by God.

If, then, speaking of the Bible, we have in mind only those things which God revealed unto man, then we may say, that the Bible contains the Word of God; for we have seen that it contains also other things which God did not reveal.

The Bible is the Word of God inasmuch as it was written under inspiration of God. When we say that the Bible is the Word of God, we have in mind not only those words and truths which God revealed to men and which therefore have their origin in God; but then we refer to the whole Bible, the *record* of both what God revealed to the holy writers and what they learned from other sources.

Speaking of the entire Old Testament canon, as it was known and accepted in the days of Christ, Paul says: *πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος*, 2 Tim. 3:16. The term "all Scripture" includes all that was written in the *ἱερὰ γράμματα*. For this reason Timothy is not cautioned that he must not accept everything he finds in them as truth and fact; that he must discriminate between what is and what is not the Word of God; that he must revise, correct, and even discard certain portions of the traditional canon. Nothing of all this. Timothy is assured that the Holy Scriptures, which he had known from a child, "are able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" and that "all Scripture . . . is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." To Paul "all Scripture" is the sole authentic source and norm of doctrine and rule and guide of life. "Whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures have hope," Rom. 15:4. The term "all Scripture," therefore, refers not only to those portions of the canon which contain direct revelations of God, but it includes also the record of historic events and happenings, as we may clearly see from 1 Cor. 10:1-11. For the passing through the sea, the idolatry and fornication, of Israel, their tempting Christ, and their murmuring against God, all these things were not a matter of divine revelation, but historic fact recorded by Moses, who witnessed them. "All Scripture" may, therefore, not be limited to those parts only of the traditional *ἱερὰ γράμματα* that contain direct and specific revelations of God, but it includes all that was written aforetime by the holy men of God.

And of this Scripture, all of it, Paul says that it is *θεόπνευστος*, God-breathed, inspired. Now, what does this mean? To see clearly, let us bear in mind that inspiration is not identical with revelation. Inspiration pertains solely to the recording of those

things which God wanted to have recorded. While it is possible that God may have revealed to individual men what was not written by inspiration, we know that in the Scriptures we have parts that were indeed written under inspiration, although they were not divine revelations, as was pointed out above. Thus it is well that we distinguish between revelation and inspiration. From whatever source the holy writers received their information, inspiration has to do solely with the recording or the writing of the Scriptures. For this reason Paul says: "All Scripture, *πάσα γραφή*, all writing, is given by inspiration of God." The same thought he expresses regarding the writers of the New Testament: "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual," 1 Cor. 2:13. The things or truths of God are expressed in words which the Holy Ghost taught.

This inspiration has at times been compared to dictation, as when a business man dictates a letter to his secretary. However, this illustration does not fit the case, and that for two reasons. In the first place, when a stenographer takes dictation, he does not gather and arrange his thought material. Mentally he is more or less only mechanically active; he merely puts down in writing what some one else is saying. But the holy writers received their information from various sources: some things were indeed revealed to them by God; others they knew from personal observation and experience; still others they learned by inquiry and investigation. And while writing these things, they were consciously and intelligently active in assembling their material and in arranging their thoughts and arguments. They acted in every way as any one of us would act when he writes a letter, an essay, or a sermon. But notwithstanding this conscious, volitional, and intelligent act on their part, they were at all times so under the control and influence of the Holy Ghost that they did not write one sentence, nor express one thought, which the Holy Ghost did not want them to write; they related those events, recorded those facts, expressed those thoughts and truths, which God wanted to have related, recorded, and expressed. Therefore as far as the fact and thought content of the Bible is concerned, it is in every detail the Word of God.

In the second place, a stenographer does not use his own words. It is not he who chooses from his knowledge of language and grammar the words most fitting to express the thoughts, nor does he construct his sentences at will and determine the diction. All this is done by him who is dictating the letter. And if such a one should employ a number of stenographers in literary ability quite

different from one another, still the product of their stenographic work would be alike in vocabulary and style, because the same person is dictating to all of them. However, with the holy writers of the various books of the Bible this is not the case. While it is true that the holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21), they exhibit a definite individuality in their writings. We observe in them the same difference in argumentation, in the use of language, and in diction as we are likely to find in various human writers. This shows that, when writing, these men acted very much as any other writer would act; each made use of his knowledge of the language, chose his words, and expressed his thoughts in his own way. They were not automata in the hands of the Holy Spirit, but were themselves consciously and intelligently active when engaged in writing, putting the stamp of their individuality upon the product of their pen. This difference is evident more in the original texts than in the translations. Nevertheless, in all this the holy men of God were so under the control and influence of the Holy Ghost that whatever they wrote "was not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." The Spirit of God took these men as they were, made use of their knowledge and learning, of their mental abilities and linguistic proficiency, yet withal so controlled their writing that every word they wrote was *θεόπνευστος*, God-breathed.

The inner, psychic working of this inspiration is a profound mystery to us, for which there is no parallel in the wide realm of human experience, which cannot be demonstrated nor explained, but which must be accepted and believed on the basis of the Scriptural statement: *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος*, 2 Tim. 3:16.

If, then, the term "Word of God" refers only to what God has actually spoken or revealed, then we may say that the Bible contains the Word of God. But if we bear in mind that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, then we must say that the Bible is the Word of God.

In this connection it might be asked: "To what does Christ refer when He says: 'Thy Word is truth,' John 17:17? Does He refer only to those parts of the Scriptures that are clearly divine revelations, and does He hint at the possibility that there are mistakes and errors in the other parts? Or does He refer to the *πᾶσα γραφή*? To what does He refer in John 10:34, 35, where He quotes from Ps. 82:6 and says: 'The Scripture cannot be broken'?" If it be argued that in Ps. 82:6 we have a direct word of God, we call attention to the destruction of Sodom (Matt. 11:23), to the widow of Sarepta and to Naaman (Luke 4:26, 27), to the manna in the wilderness (John 6:49), and even to the much-ridiculed story of

Jonah and the whale (Matt. 12:40); to all of these Christ refers as to indisputable facts. To Christ the *πᾶσα γραφή* was a unit, and all of it was the Word of God.

And how much of the Scriptures is to be the source of doctrine and the rule of life? Only those portions which modern critics decide to be the Word of God or all Scripture? Paul answers that question, saying: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. 3:16, and: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope," Rom. 15:4.

Hence, we may not discard any part of the Bible as irrelevant, outmoded, erroneous, and false, but all Scripture must be to us the Word of God by inspiration given. For it is inconceivable that the Holy Ghost, who moved the holy men, should have permitted them to say or to write anything that was not true. It is, therefore, a serious matter for any one to assume a critical attitude towards the Word of God. To do so reveals a proud and overbearing spirit, which is puffed up in its own little learning. Let us rather bear in mind: "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word," Is. 66, 2.

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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

New Year's Eve

Ps. 102:26-28

Again we write December 31. This day brings us to the end of another year. Within a few hours, according to our accepted calendar, there will be a change of time, a change of years. The year 1940 will come to an end, the year 1941 will begin.

At a time such as this serious thoughts fill the minds of many people, particularly this year, when things are so upset and disturbed throughout the world. We think of the terrible war conditions in Europe and Asia, with millions disturbed, homeless, hungry, wounded, dead. We think of the end of all existing orders, all existing governments, even of all time. As we view disturbed world conditions, as we see so many things we have cherished upset and disturbed and destroyed, our hearts may be filled with fear. Compare Luke 21:25b, 26.

At a time like this it is well for us to turn to a text such as the one chosen for tonight. This text emphasizes