

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE And WHY WE BELIEVE IT IS GOD'S WORD

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CHAPTER THREE

AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

THE acceptance of the Bible is due to the belief that it embodies a divine Revelation. Religion involves a Revelation, but it is necessary to inquire as to the grounds on which the Bible is regarded as containing and expressing that Revelation.

No one can read the Old or the New Testament without seeing indications that the writers believed that they could and did receive communications from GOD:

“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1).

“And the word of the LORD came unto me” (Ezekiel 6:1).

“Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness” (Luke 3:2).

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep” (I Thessalonians 4:15).

At this point some fundamental presuppositions must be considered.

First, Revelation is possible. If we believe that GOD exists and is almighty, then of course he can communicate himself to us.

Second, Revelation is probable, inasmuch as self-revelation is natural to us.

We cannot help communicating ourselves to others, because of interest and love, and, as GOD is love, this fact implies that he will communicate himself, because it is the essence of love to reveal itself.

Third, Revelation is necessary. There are two things essential for life - Knowledge and Power; what Matthew Arnold once called "light and leading." And these are all the more needed because of sin. Sin has brought uncertainty, and this demands knowledge. Sin has brought weakness, and this necessitates power.

These considerations lead to the thought that Revelation is available in the Person of the Lord JESUS CHRIST (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

A person communicates himself by acts or by words, or by both. For the first disciples, for the earliest Christian Church before our Lord's resurrection - that is to say, for the community of his immediate followers - *His Presence was a revelation*, his Person was sufficient; but we today have his words, since we have not his outward Presence as they had (John 20:30,31; II Timothy 3:16,17).

Our position therefore is this - GOD has revealed himself in nature, in providence and in history; but preeminently he has revealed himself in CHRIST for spiritual realities.

Natural religion has not been found sufficient for human life, because of sin. Man's nature has never been an adequate mirror of divine revelation.

Now of this revelation in CHRIST, we believe that the New Testament is the purest, fullest, and clearest expression and embodiment. We are not concerned for the moment whether the revelation came in this way or in that way. All that is essential is that we have whatever it is and however it has come - a revelation of GOD in CHRIST.

It is at least significant to note that all the great religions have their sacred books.

It would seem as though the *litera scripta (the written word)* were a foundation, a necessary condition of all divine revelation.

We proceed to state that Revelation is assured. This is the heart of our present subject:

Why do we believe the Bible to be a divine revelation?

I do not now refer to the Old Testament in detail, because if we can prove the New Testament to be divine this carries the Old Testament with it. We are on the most convenient ground if we concentrate on the New Testament, and look upon that as the embodiment of a divine revelation.

There are just three steps in this argument.

First, the New Testament is genuine; that is, it is the work of those for whom it is claimed - the early believers in JESUS CHRIST.

This genuineness of the New Testament may be proved in a variety of ways.

(a) *There is the testimony of the Church through the centuries.*

(b) *There is the direct testimony of the Books themselves.*

If we examine them we see clear evidence that they came from the apostles' time. It is easy to see the New Testament possesses evidences of genuineness. Its allusions to Jewish, Roman, and Greek history and customs prove its early date. Such allusions would have been impossible later.

(c) *There is the testimony of adversaries.*

Every opposition to Christianity from the second century onward has been directed toward the New Testament.

Why did men like Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, and Rousseau oppose it? If they did not think anything of this book, why did they trouble about it?

Secondly, the New Testament is credible; that is, it is worthy to be believed.

There are many books genuine, but not credible. The New Testament is not only genuine, but is worthy of our belief. Why? For several reasons.

- Because of the unblemished character of the witnesses.
- Because of the agreement of the facts of the New Testament with the acts of Christianity in the world.
- Because the contents of the New Testament do nothing but good.
- Because the explorations of Palestine, Egypt, and Babylon go to confirm the truth of the Bible, Old and New Testaments.

There have been many archeological researches, and not one has gone against the Bible, or proved it untrue.

Lastly, if we have followed the argument so far, we shall be prepared to take the third step. The New Testament is divine.

What are the reasons for this? There are many ways of proving it, some of which will come before us later. But now attention is concentrated on three points, which will be sufficient for the purpose.

First, *there is that in the Old Testament which is always pointing forward to the future, especially to the coming of the Messiah.*

In Liddon's Bampton Lectures it is shown that there are 333 references to the Messiah in the Old Testament, and Dr. Pierson argued that, based upon mathematical grounds, the concentration of all these 333 references on an individual, in face of all probabilities against it, is nothing short of marvelous. Each time we add a reference, we reduce the probability of the allusions centering on one person; and when we get to 333, and all these concentrate on one Man, we see at once the force of this extraordinary expectation.

And what does the power of prediction mean but the Supernatural?

Secondly, we turn to the New Testament and consider the Person of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. We notice the portrait of CHRIST, and note the combination and balance of qualities in him, and the perfection of his character.

The third of these proofs or attestations concerns the results of Christianity.

Let us observe the effects of Christianity on life.

- Life is the problem, and CHRIST is the solution;
- Life is the question, and CHRIST is the answer.

If we want to see the results of Christianity, we should test it by other religions.

- If we would know what Confucianism has done, let us look at China;
- If we would know what Buddhism has done, let us look at India;
- If we would know what Islam has done, let us look at Turkey and Persia.

We do not despise any of these religions. They are what Tennyson calls "*broken lights*." But while they are "lights," they are "broken."

There is one great difference between them and Christianity; in each of these, man is seeking GOD; in Christianity, GOD is seeking man.

These religions are human aspirations; Christianity is a divine revelation.

And so, we conclude that GOD has spoken; and this message is in the Bible or nowhere else. It calls for a personal test from every one of us.

In the present day a great deal is rightly said about the argument from experience. There is no other book in the world that will so verify itself to human experience, and this is because it contains and embodies a divine revelation.

Whatever may be said about history and philosophy and morality, the crowning point is: What is the Bible to us?

And when the Bible is really a force in our own heart and life, we cannot possibly doubt that it comes from GOD.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the basis of the acceptance of the Bible?
2. State and define the three necessary presuppositions concerning revelation.
3. Who is the supreme revealer of GOD?
4. What is our position regarding revelation?
5. What is the clearest, fullest and most complete expression and embodiment of the revelation of GOD?
6. Why do we believe the Bible to be a divine revelation?
7. To what conclusion does all this lead?
8. What reasons may be assigned for this conclusion?
9. Compare, in a word, the ethnic religions and Christianity.
10. What one thing constitutes the Bible a unique book?

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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