

The Inerrant Source of Truth

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THE Son of the living God not only lived on earth among men and as a man but also entered the mysterious realm of death. He knows all its secrets. Not one is hidden from Him.

He did not remain in that dread realm, however, as others have. He could not be held there; He broke its bonds, delivered Himself from its power, and returned to life. And He is alive forevermore. "Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over him." (Romans 6:9).

He had power to break the dominion of death; He has knowledge of all the secrets, both of life and of death.

To supply that knowledge to men, and to impart that power, a revelation is necessary, an authoritative revelation. He has supplied that revelation and embodied it in a Book, the most reliable Book in the world.

For the first disciples, those who knew Him and companioned with Him, and saw Him meet death, and talked with Him after He came again to life, His very presence was a complete revelation.

But we today do not have His visible presence, though He is alive. We do have His words. These are sufficient and adequate-and altogether reliable.

All Scripture Inspired

The revelation He has made of life and death and eternity is embodied in a Book. That Book is known as the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. And "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for instruction, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

The authority and reliability of the Bible as a revelation of God and His Son Jesus Christ may be demonstrated with convincing certainty by its genuineness, its credibility, and its divine origin.

It is genuine, this revelation. The men wrote it who claim they wrote it. There is no fraud about it, no deception. For this we have the testimony of the church through the centuries; the direct testimony of its sixty-six books themselves; the confirmation of this testimony by the allusions to Jewish, Roman, and Greek history contained in them, allusions which could not have been made accurately by later writers; and the testimony of the opponents of Christianity through the centuries who, while opposing the teachings of the Book, have, by their very opposition, confirmed the truth that such writings by such writers existed in their day and were genuine.

The Book is credible. It is worthy of acceptance and belief. Other books may be genuine but not true. The Bible is both. Its credibility is evidenced by the untarnished character of its writers, its agreement with the established facts of history, the unvarying beneficial and helpful effects of its teaching, and the multiplying corroborations of archeological research. Of all the manifold discoveries of archeology not one is in conflict with the Bible. New discoveries consistently continue to confirm its truth and accuracy.

The Bible is of divine origin. No other conclusion is possible when its infallible accuracy in prediction and prophecy is considered; when its unique conception of the person of Christ, with His superhuman balance and combination of qualities, and the sinless perfection of His character, is examined; when its unvaryingly beneficial effects on human life in all centuries, all races, all places, all conditions, are taken into account.

This last is the great, the determining, the pragmatic test. "By their fruits ye shall know them." If you would know the divine or human character of a religion, look at what it does. If you would know the character of Confucianism, look at China. If you would know the character of Mohammedanism, look at Turkey and Iran. If you would know the character of Buddhism and Hinduism, look at India. Then look at Christianity, the religion of the Book, and the consistent, never failing effect it has on those who accept it and on the lands where it is given free course.

It is different. It is divine. In all others man is groping for and seeking God. In Christianity, God is seeking man. The others, all of them, are but human aspirations, poor, feeble, inadequate. Christianity, revealed in the Book, is a divine revelation supplying every human need.

So God has spoken to man. He has spoken to man in His Son and in His Word. And the revelation of His truth for us is in the Bible, as it is nowhere else.

That being so, the question of the ultimate authority regarding truth is settled. The last and supreme word concerning God, man, life, death, and eternity has been spoken. That supreme authority is the Bible.

There are those who would have us believe that the source of final authority is to be found in human reason. They are wrong. I would not deprecate reason. It is valuable and altogether indispensable. To test the claims of any professed revelation, reason is necessary. It is wholly necessary in order to receive the revelation thus tested. Nevertheless, it is not the source of authority.

The reasoning faculties of mankind have been affected by the fall of the race. Sin has not left these untouched but has unsettled their delicate balance and accurate functioning. Absolute reliance cannot be placed on their operation. Even if this were not so, there is such a thing as truth and reality wholly apart from, and independent of, reason.

Truth is not what I believe. Truth is not even what I know. Truth is fact. I may not believe it. I may not know it. That does not change it. It is there nevertheless, waiting to be discovered and believed.

Truth does not depend on the unsettled and changing opinions of men. It was truth before it was believed. It remains truth, whether it is believed or not. Reason does not originate or create it. It merely discovers it. Consequently, reason is not a source. Truth goes back beyond reason.

Others would have us believe that the church is the source of authority, particularly in matters of theology. They are wrong.

The church is the product of truth. It does not originate it. It came into being by accepting divine revelation. It is not the source of that revelation. Truth goes beyond the church, is antecedent to it.

The Source of Authority

It is in the Bible that we have the source of authority. It is in the Bible that we have embodied and preserved the revelation God has made. That revelation is in this Book in its clearest, purest, its fullest form. The Bible is true, and it contains the truth. In it we possess the best available form of God's revelation to man.

It is not a Book of one age, one race, or one language. From its earliest years it has passed readily, by spontaneous reception, from race to race and from people to people. As the centuries have passed, it has migrated without violence into new regions, and found a home among widely different tribes, separated though they have been by every conceivable difference of climate, government, custom, culture, and religion. As it conquered the conquering Goths and other barbarians of the early centuries, so today its sway is felt throughout the whole world, heathen and civilized alike.

That its power is not derived from race or climate is demonstrated when it is taken to savage, cannibal islands and transforms barbarians into peaceful, law-abiding citizens; when it changes a wild, native warrior into the editor of a paper, and a Negro slave into the president of an African republic. It changes human lives for the better wherever its teachings are followed and its truths accepted.

It has stimulated the intellects and energies and attracted the love and veneration of men. The literary geniuses of the world, in struggling to give utterance to their thoughts, have drawn largely from this Book. The greatest masters of prose -Bacon, Milton, Ruskin, Macaulay-have, perhaps unconsciously but no less really, laid hold of Scripture phrase and metaphor.

The influence of the Bible on Shakespeare's genius and writings is so striking as to have stimulated many writers to analyze and trace it. The extraordinary influence and authority of this Book, as compared with that of any and all others, is seen, too, in other aspects of life, in sculpture, in painting, in music. It has stimulated genius in these fields as has no other agency. Its majestic scenes have become the outstanding themes of painting and music. The greatest masters of these arts never weary of embodying the ideas it suggests. Its altogether unique word pictures, its vivid narratives, its poetry and pathos, have served as an inexhaustible source of inspiration to painters.

Every event of outstanding importance recorded in its pages has been made the subject of some great oratorio, on which the gifts of their genius have been lavished by such masters as Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn. The greatest paintings of Raphael and Michelangelo can be traced to it. The greatest modern epic, Paradise Lost, and the greatest musical creation, The Messiah, are built on the mighty themes of the Bible.

The position the Bible has occupied, and increasingly occupies, amid such various circumstances, through such distant ages, among such different races, amid such fluctuations of taste, and in spite of all the opposition of its enemies makes it an altogether singular phenomenon.

For twice a thousand years the Sacred Scriptures have gone hand in hand with advancing civilization, with science, law, letters, learning, the arts in brief, with the moral and intellectual cultivation of the human race, always stimulating and leading the way.

A Universal Book

So the Bible is one of the greatest facts in the history of mankind. It is universal in its appeal. Though it is Oriental in its origin and background, nevertheless its teachings carry a profound appeal to, and wield a powerful influence among, every people and race on earth. It influences every type of mind, every degree of intellect, every gradation of life. Prince and peasant, artisan and mechanic, ruler and subject, employer and laborer, learned and unlearned—all alike read its fascinating pages, study its profound truths, and are benefited thereby.

Its words are spirit and life. It is different, wholly different, from every human product. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is poetry. Shakespeare's writings are tragedy and comedy. Cicero's writings are eloquence. But Christ's word is life. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

The words of the Bible are filled with living e. pointed with penetrating power. "The word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Here, in this Book, is truth, authoritative and final truth, the words of Him who Himself is very truth, who was dead, and is alive, and who holds the keys of death and the grave.

Therefore, in searching for the truth of this question of death, of what becomes of a man when he dies, we go to this source with complete confidence. The authority of the Bible we take as supreme and final. It is above reason. Not that reason and the Bible must of necessity be in conflict. The Bible is the light of reason, of human thought; it comes from God. Reason may be, should be, employed upon it. Reason examines its claims, weighs its evidence, tests, sifts, inquires, studies, analyzes, but the moment it becomes convinced, accepts the truth, and then takes a subordinate place and makes the Bible, the revelation of God, supreme.

The authority of the Bible is supreme because it is divine. It is above the church. The church is a witness to the Bible; it is not its author. It is a keeper of the Bible; it is not its maker. The Bible is above creeds. Creeds are often very able, but they are the productions of men, and therefore fallible and liable to error. The Bible was produced under the control and guidance and direction of the Spirit of God, and is therefore inerrant in its teachings. The creeds are not binding upon the conscience; the Bible is. They contain only human echoes of the heavenly message; the Bible is that message.

It is, therefore, to this divine Source that we turn in our search for light and truth on this supremely important question of the condition of man in death.