

ON

THE SCRIPTURES.

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LONDON:  
PRINTED BY J. B. BATEMAN,  
11 VY LANE, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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WE may, by a little consideration, observe the value which God has set on *the revelation* He has, from time to time, been making of Himself and His will, and also our own title to the direct personal use of that revelation. And such truths are of serious and happy importance to our souls at all times, but, in some sense, especially now.

When the Lord God planted and furnished the garden, and set Adam in it, He made all to depend on His word or revelation: "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." This was the revelation then, and man's history, as we know, was to hang entirely upon it. And thus, at the very outset, we see what a place of value the word which had gone out from the mouth of the Lord holds: and it became the direct object of the serpent's assault and enmity.

So, when the character of things had been changed through man's disobedience to this first word of God, all is made to depend on another word: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his

heel." Man's return to God now depended on his belief of this word, as his departure from God had afore hung on his disobedience to the first word. For all now rested on *faith*, or *obedience to this revelation*. Thus we find that Abel, by *faith*, offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. All service from man now rested on faith, or obedience to the word or revelation of God (Heb. xi.). So high was the value which the Lord put on His word, making it, as before, the standard and the test of obedience, and the hinge on which man's history was to turn. And Cain's offering was in unbelief, or in despite of God's word about the seed of the woman. He *despised* God's word, as the serpent had before *assailed* it. And so, in process of time, in like manner, Noah and Abraham, to instance no others, are called forth from a revolted world *by revelations from God*, and their acceptance of such revelations determine their path in present peace onward to glory.

But when we reach a larger scene for the energies and acts of God, as in the nation of Israel, we still find that all was made to turn upon *the revelation* He was giving His people. We read that they were neither to add to it or diminish from it (Deut. iv. xii.). So carefully did He hedge round it, so jealously did He watch over it, that it might not be entangled with the thorns of the wilderness of worldly wisdom, or disturbed by the admixtures of man's thoughts. And having thus protected it,

and provided for its purity, Jehovah ordered that His people should bind it round their heart and their soul, and fix it under their eye continually, inscribing it on their gates and doors, making it their morning and evening meditation, and the theme of their family intercourse (Deut. vi. xi.), so that they should let it in, that it might mingle itself with all their personal and social life, and shed its light on every path, however ordinary, of their daily journey. And if any of them were put at a distance from the more immediate place of the nation and of their religious observances, still *the word* was to be their rule there (Josh. xxii. 4, 5). And if any of them were called into circumstances which might be extraordinary or unlooked for, the same word of God should follow them there; for if there were to be a king in days to come, the law of his God should go up to the throne with him, and be there before him as fully as he was before the people (Deut. xvii.). And the history of Israel as a nation, like that of Adam in Eden and out of Eden, was to be determined by their use of God's word (Deut. xxviii.).

What an expression of the value which the Lord set upon His word all this gives us! and with what jealousy does He watch it, that He may maintain it in its purity! and how immediately would He have it bound round the heart and soul of each of His people!

It is blessed to see the Lord thus esteeming His

own revelation, and commending it to our esteem ; and, as we go on in His ways, it is *His word* we still find the Lord using and estimating. Israel was disobedient to the word of *His law*, and what He does, is to send them the word of *His Prophets*. If they refuse one testimony, it is only another they must get. God will still use His word, and still make their history to rest on their use or abuse of it. And, therefore, we find that their final dispersion and bondage in Babylon came of this, that when the Lord had even risen up early to send them His prophets, they did but despise those Prophets, and the words which they brought ; so that wrath came on them to the uttermost, and there was now no remedy (2 Chron. xxxvi.).

There is, however, a return to Jerusalem out of Babylon ; and return to God then, is marked very clearly by a return to his word. The captives are obedient to the word. Ezra, for instance, makes it his meditation, the theme of his intercourse with the people, and the rule of his ways and acts in the midst of them (chap. vii.). So Nehemiah and his companions. They read it, they own the power of it over their consciences, and they set themselves to walk and act in the light of it (chap. viii., xiii.). As long, or as far, as those returned Jews were obedient to God, so long, and so far, were they attentive to the voice of His truth, both trembling at, and rejoicing in, His word according to its spirit in addressing them. They had re-

turned to God, and must, therefore, return to His word; and while this was so, blessing was theirs, and latter day blessing is made to depend on this also (Mal. iv. 5, 6).

When we open the New Testament, after all this, we find *the word*, or revelation of God, in this accustomed place of honour and value. It is put into the lips of the Baptist; no power lies in his hand, but the word of the Lord breaks from his lips. "John did no miracle," but his was a "voice" from God, acceptance of which was again to determine the history of Israel. So the Lord's own ministry, which this of John introduced, was not only a fresh ministry of God's word (on the value of which I will not speak), but it did itself greatly honour the precious word; and this still shows us what value in God's esteem His word holds. Thus—in his *acts*, the Lord Jesus was ever fulfilling that word, as the Evangelists are careful to tell us—in His *conflicts* with the Devil, He uses that word, as the Gospels again tell us—and in His *teachings*, He is ever referring to that word, rebuking the Jews for their value for anything else, for their use of traditions, and their neglect of it, and giving them to know that not a jot or tittle of it can in any wise fail, that the Scripture cannot be broken; and that if Moses and the Prophets be not heard, even one risen from the dead would not avail to lead to repentance.

This is much to be observed—and thus did *the*

*Son*, in His day, honour the word.—The Holy Ghost, in like manner, is a Spirit of revelation in the Apostles, and fills up by them the word of God. But not only so, but in them He does continually, clearly, and fully, express his high divine sense of the value of the scriptures. *If man dare not add to it, God need not.* It is perfect, able, as the apostle tells us, thoroughly to furnish the saint to all good works. And no authority stands, or can possibly stand, on equal ground with it, so that even if an angel were to gainsay it, he must be cursed. It matters not who it may be, all must sink below the voice and authority of that Gospel or revelation of God which had been delivered.

Thus do we see, from the beginning to the end, the Lord's value for His own word—how He has made a hedge about it, that no rude hand may guiltlessly touch it, and also has appointed it to be the great standard at all times, on which the history of His people, either for blessing or for curse, was to turn: and has bound it round the heart and soul, before the eyes, and on the palms of His people, and given it an authority which nothing is to be allowed either to gainsay or to rival. God of old, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, each in His-day, attests this. And all this is precious to the soul. *God and His word are joined together.* To give up His word is to give up Himself. For He can be known only by His own revelation.

But if we thus see the divine estimate of the word, we may, with equal clearness and sureness, see our title to that word, and how the Lord has joined us and the word together also, and that no man, therefore, can put such asunder.

By one short sentence, the "ready writer" has given all saints an immediate personal interest in all the *old* scriptures. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." This one sentence writes our title to this most precious inheritance. The old scriptures are God's gift; and this word from Rom. xv. is the deed of gift, entitling all saints to a common property in it. The title is short, and clear, and simple, as the inheritance conveyed is invaluable.

But with equal simplicity can we make out our title to the *new* scriptures. Luke addresses his gospel to a private christian friend, as we may speak, hereby shewing that it was written for the saint in the most ordinary circumstances. Not committed to any elect order of persons, or persons in authority, but to a private christian friend, who bore no office or distinction of any kind, of whom, indeed, we hear nothing but in this address of the evangelist to him. But this shews that this gospel is given to us all. And if Luke be thus part of our inheritance, so surely are Matthew, Mark, and John. We ask no favour from any one to allow this: the title is so clear, so simple, so beyond all question: and on the very



same ground is our title to the Book of the Acts. That was the property of the same private friend, the same Theophilus: any "lover of God" may deem himself in fullest possession of that, as a further part of his inheritance, and use it without reserve.

The Epistles, in their turn, not only convey their rare and valuable treasures to our souls, but at the very outset tell us of our title to them.

They are addressed, (saving in personal cases, as Timothy, Titus, or Philemon,) to the saints, or the churches in the different places to which the Spirit, by His apostle, sends them: and the Book of Revelation, which, following the epistles, closes the volume of God, is sent to the seven churches in Asia; and thus we read the title of all saints to these words. They are not specially committed to any separated order of men, but cast upon the hearts of all the saints, as Moses had done with all the statutes and judgments of Israel. And I may add, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" would never have been written to the saints at Colosse, if they had not title to the immediate personal enjoyment of that word. But so it is, blessed be God. *He has as simply joined His word and the heart of His saint together, as He has joined Himself and His word together.* And we say again, what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

And if any do so violently—if any take away

the key of knowledge—they are falling under the direct judgment of the Lord; “woe unto you, lawyers, for ye have taken away the key of knowledge” (Luke xi. 52).

Such is God’s estimation of his own precious revelation, and such His care that it should be kept pure.—But in connection with this, I would, for a little moment, look at 1 Kings xiii.

The kingdom of the ten tribes, under Jeroboam, was at this time an unclean place. The calves of gold set up at Bethel and at Dan were the confidence of the people, obedient to this word of their king, “Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of Egypt.”

The Lord sends a missionary into that land with words of judgment. His commission, his ministry, and his conduct in his ministry, were all specially ordered by “the word of the Lord.” He comes out of Judah to Bethel “by the word of the Lord” (ver. 1.); he cries against the altar there “in the word of the Lord” (ver. 2); and his behaviour, while in that place and doing that service, is prescribed to him “by the word of the Lord” (ver. 9). And thus, as we said, his commission, his ministry, and his conduct—all are under the light and authority of God’s word. That provided for everything. He had only to observe it.

This is most particularly marked by the Spirit of God in this narrative. And at the beginning, the Lord’s missionary, “the man of God,” acts

accordingly—he pleads “the word” as the warrant for his ministry of judgment upon the altar at Bethel, and also against the offers and invitations of Jeroboam, making it the only light and guide of his path while in his country. And this was all safe and happy. The Lord had given him a very simple directory, and in the observing of it his path was maintained in security and peace.

But that old serpent who, in the garden of Eden, made “the word of the Lord” the object of his attack, and has ever since been seducing the heart of man from it, tries with this man of God something further, since the offers and invitations of a king are resisted.

There was “an old prophet” in Israel at that time; another man of God, I doubt not, but, like Lot, found in a place where he ought not to have been, and where he could not act in character as a prophet; for how could he reprove the darkness with which he was more or less in fellowship?

Such an one is easily used by the enemy, and so it proves here. The father of lies employs him to do his work, and he tempts the Lord’s missionary to eat and drink with him, contrary to “the word” which he had received, under the pretence that “an angel” from the Lord had spoken to him. And the temptation prevails: the path of simple obedience to “the word of the Lord” is deserted, and the servant of God dies under the judgment of God—a kind of pillar of salt, a kind of

abiding witness and warning to us all, that our souls may ever hold to this—"let God be true, but every man a liar."

Deep and serious, and, for the present evil day, well-timed, is the instruction of this little narrative. The man who withstood the invitations of a king, and had determined on cleaving to "the word of the Lord," though against the offers of a man in power, falls under the pretences of a man of religion. A religious guise seduces one whom the splendours of a court had tempted in vain. And so it is still, and will increasingly be. The devil is still practising by what the world judges to be religion, as it judged and estimated the traditions and observances of the Pharisees of old. And he succeeds if he can but withdraw from subjection to "the word of the Lord." That is what God opposes to every thing:—"If they speak not according to it, there is no light in them."

Clearly, then, do we trace in the scriptures God's value for His word or revelation, and the believer's title to it. If God's word be deserted, He Himself is given up, for He can be known only by the revelation of it. There is no light in the soul—"They have taken away the key of knowledge;"—and our Lord joins this with not entering into the kingdom of God (Luke xi.).

There is an opposite error. There is the taking of this key, and using it to one's own destruction. The untaught and unstable do this (2 Pet. iii.).

The mere human or intellectual man, in the confidence of his own strength, takes this key, and injures, all he can, the door of the treasury of wisdom and knowledge, through his awkwardness or violence. This is very true. And the danger is, lest, being offended by this, as the saint should and must righteously be, he is cast on the former error, and tempted to let the key of knowledge be taken away, and deposited in some sacred hand, as is thought. But one error is not to be corrected by another: the key is neither to be taken away, nor used unskilfully.

I fully, however, allow, and it is to be deeply remembered by our souls, in a day of intellectual pretence like the present, and of much activity of human thought and wisdom, that the book of God is not to be subjected to the mere acuteness of man's mind. Far otherwise indeed. It demands, in the name of God, our full subjection to itself. Nor is it written, as one has said, for critics, for scholars, or for judges, but for sinners. "It is not an interesting exercise for our faculties," that we are to expect in it. And it is by laying aside malice and envy and hypocrisies, and by simple desire after the living God Himself, that we are really to grow by its sincere milk or strong meat (1 Pet. ii. 1, 2). I would indeed add this to what I have said on the value of the scriptures. The Lord forbid that we should say any thing that would appear to treat it as only one of the many books of the schools.

For the Son of God is not the mere Master of a new school, but the living Head of a church, to minister nourishment, through joints and bands, to the whole body. And let me add the striking and seasonable language of one of other days.—“Wouldest thou know that the matters contained in the word of Christ are *real* things?—*then never read them for mere knowledge sake*. Look for some beams of Christ’s glory and power in every verse. Account nothing knowledge, but as it is seasoned with some revelation of the glorious presence of Christ, and His quickening Spirit. Use no conference about spiritual truths for conference sake, but still mind the promotion of edification.”

This would help to put the soul into a right attitude, when purposing to learn the secrets of God’s most precious oracles. And when the apostle prays for the saints (as in Eph. i. and Col. i.), that they may grow in *knowledge*, he does this after he has sought for them that they might have a *spiritual understanding*; and this tells us, or intimates to us, that mere acquaintance with, or information about, scripture, would all be divinely nothing worth, and that we should be careful not to pursue enquiry into revealed truth by the light or skill of the human mind, but by the exercise of the understanding given to us in Christ Jesus.

All this, surely, I would uphold before my own conscience at all times. But all this leaves un-

touched the great truth we have been mainly considering—the value of the written word *with* God and *to* us, and that it is the great one standard for the testing of all our thoughts, and the common inheritance of all the children. It is even the delight and commendation of an inspired apostle, that Timothy, the child of a child of God, from his childhood had known that word. So surely has God bound it about the heart and soul of His people. Therefore, again we say, let no authority divorce them or put them asunder, neither let any one use it, but in that holy obedient mind that is due to a gift of God.

The Spirit, in a very large sense, gives the scriptures *to all*. For in the inspired penman of The Acts, the Holy Ghost commends the Bereans for their candour, their nobleness, in searching the scriptures, whether what even an Apostle was teaching was according to them. It was grateful to the mind of the Holy Ghost, to have His word thus used and honoured by these poor private Jews. Bereans they were, of the synagogue in that city; and the Spirit rejoices at seeing the scriptures in their hands, making them *the standard*, even though an apostle was preaching unto them. This surely puts the written word in high places. And so the same apostle, as quickened by the same Spirit, reasoned with the Jews out of the same scriptures, from “morning to evening;” as Jesus Himself restored the minds of the two disciples by

leading them *through all the scriptures*. Peter also commends the disciples to the light of the *prophetic word*, and by his own word would ever have them bear in mind all that was needful for them, whether for past, present, or future truth; and never (as another has observed) thinks of commending them to any official or apostolic successor of his, but to that *word* which the *Holy Ghost*, *by him*, was then delivering. As even teachers, feeders of God's flock—as spiritual elders set over them are commended to God and *His word*, and not to any thing else, in order that they might be kept and edified. (Acts xx., Luke xxiv., 2 Pet. i.).

This, and more than this, which we have, is more than enough to make our souls prize this precious, precious gift of God—much more precious to our souls by the attempt there has ever been made to take it from us, as not belonging to us, and depositing it in some dark and distant corner. They have sought to put asunder what God has joined together—the heart of His wayfaring saint and the light of His word.

God's word may be given up by the infidel who rejects it; but it may be given up, though in another way, by him who would join other words with it.

Traditional christianity is real infidelity; for it denies the scriptures, which assert their own sufficiency, and make themselves the standard. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not



according to this word, it is because they have no light in them." And again, "the wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken; lo! they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them." "A betrayer of the book, in purer days, was judged as wicked an one, as the denier of the faith." But the one is *profane* infidelity—the other is *religious* infidelity, and man by much chooses the latter. It enables him to keep God at a distance, which is the desire of man, or the flesh, and at the same time to keep a conscience at peace with religion still, which is equally his desire.

Sorrowful is the sight, that man still prevails—prevails in the religion of the world, as well as in its kingdoms. But blessed, blessed indeed, the prospect of entering a sphere, where Jesus shall prevail, and that for ever. The light of God's thoughts shall shine there, the righteousness of God's power shall be felt there. Times of restitution indeed—times of refreshing; because times of Jesus' presence.

It is not merely *thoughts of God* that our souls need: all religion, divine or human, that is, true or false, will teach us to think of God. But it is *the* thoughts of God we need to have brought into our souls—and those thoughts are to be learned only, authoritatively and unmixedly, in the word. The Scriptures are these thoughts of God conveyed to us. And the Psalmist can say of them,

“how precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God, how great is the sum of them—if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.” O that we may thus prize them: then shall we be wiser than the ancients, having respect to God’s testimonies.

I would add, in the words of another, “the malice of Satan has raged no less against the book than the truth contained in it.” This we might expect. For what is the book of God? In the words of the same, “God’s merciful and stedfast relief against all that confusion, darkness, and uncertainty, which the vanity, folly, and baseness of the minds of men, heightened by the unspeakable distractions that fall out among them, would otherwise have certainly run into.” And this book, like every work of God, manifests itself. It is its own witness:—“Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” And in contrast with all other words—with all words or writings which are not His—the Lord says, “What is the chaff to the wheat?” (Jer. xxiii.). Such things do we learn of the word, or the scriptures.

And in closing, I would just say, that *we need the whole of it, but nothing supplemental to it*. This is intimated both by the Lord and Moses:—“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. viii., Matt. iv.). This testimony is strong. These

words tell us that nothing *less*, nothing *more*, is needed as food for the sustaining and strengthening of divine life in our souls, the Spirit, most surely, being alone able to make it effectual. The soul does not know what portion of the precious word, in its conflict with various darknesses and subtleties of Satan, it may not need, but it *can live by that*. Its life will not need aught beside, but it is not to spare any of it. These two thoughts are clearly intimated in these words. And thus, for our blessing, as for the divine Giver's praise, we are not to add thereto, or diminish therefrom. We may and shall attain different measures in the knowledge of it, according as there is gift of God, and the exercise of the spiritual senses; but we are to make it the common standard in the camp of God. And the standard-bearer of the Lord must not faint in the day of battle. A *firm* hand and a *broken* heart are to give character to us.

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“Thy testimonies *are* wonderful:  
 Therefore doth my soul keep them.  
 “The entrance of thy words giveth light;  
 It giveth understanding unto the simple.  
 “I opened my mouth, and panted:  
 For I longed for thy commandments.”

Psa. cxix. 129, 130, 131.

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