

GRAINS & GLEANINGS REPRINTS, No. 5.

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. THE .  
Sufficiency of the Written  
Word and the Use of It.

2 PETER III.

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*C. E. STUART.*

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Reprinted from "PRESENT TESTIMONY,"  
1869.

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## The Sufficiency of the Written Word and the Use of It.

### 2. PETER III.

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GOD never leaves His people without light sufficient for their way. To the patriarchs He appeared from time to time, to direct them in their pilgrim journeys : in visions too and by dreams He communicated to them His will. He appears to Isaac to forbid his contemplated descent into Egypt. He spake in visions of the night unto Jacob, to encourage him to sojourn in it. Under the law, by dreams or visions, by Urim and Thummim, or by prophets, the people of Israel received divine guidance for the circumstances in which they were placed. The law pointed out what they ought to do ; but when declension came in, prophets were raised up, to recall the people to their allegiance, to direct them at the time, and to tell them of the future. The written Word of God, as they received it, was liable at any time to be supplemented by fresh revelations communicated to a prophet, who might be of humble origin, as Amos, one of the herdmen of Tekoa ; or a member of the family of Aaron, as Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. Such a condition of things, whilst serving to impress them

with a sense of the Lord's constant care for their well-being, must have tended to keep them looking around to discover who in their midst might be next used to reveal still further His mind. The written Word was then manifestly an incomplete revelation of God's will, though, as far as it went, the people had to give heed to it, and obey it. It had an authority which none other could have, for it was God's word; yet they might lawfully look for fresh additions to be made.

With us the case is different. With the departure of the Apostles from earth all additions to the word of God ceased. All that God would have unfolded before the Lord comes for His Church has been for nearly eighteen centuries in the hands of His saints. "He who is the truth has been manifested, and has revealed the Father" (John xiv. 6). The Spirit of truth, who is the truth, is here to guide us into all the truth (John xvi. 13; 1 John v. 6); so a complete revelation it is that we possess. The word of God has been fulfilled, and none have authority to add to it; hence the marked difference between the closing injunctions of Moses and Malachi to Israel, and the last directions of the Apostles to us. Moses, in the land of Moab, near Jordan, spoke of secret things then hidden in the bosom of God, and directed the people to await the coming of the prophet like unto himself, to whom they were to hearken in all that he should say unto them. Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, closes with an announcement of the coming of Elijah, the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come, thus intimating that fresh communications might be made from God to Israel. Paul, on the other hand, at the close of his life, bids Timothy hold fast the form of sound words which he had heard of him; advises as the corrective for the errors which were, and should be

prevalent, the preaching the Word; and provides for the transmission of the truth, already communicated, to those who should come after. Jude exhorts believers to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, in view of the approaching apostasy; reminds them of the words before spoken by the Apostles as to the persons who would be found in the assemblies of the saints; and brings forward a prophecy of Enoch, not before recorded in the Word, with respect to the judgment that would fall on these men. The prophecy delivered before the flood, and the teaching of the Apostles already known, were sufficient to warn the faithful as to these men and their end. John, writing to the babes in Christ, urges them to let that abide in them which they have heard from the beginning: if that abides in them they shall abide in the Son and in the Father. James, whilst adding to our knowledge of Elijah, hints not at any further revelations to be afterwards vouchsafed. And Peter says he writes "to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the Apostles (*or*, of your Apostles) of the Lord and Saviour." They all turn the thoughts of their converts to what has been revealed as sufficient for guidance, and all that is requisite for communion with the Father and the Son in the end, and to the end of the days.

The possession, then, of the full unfolding of God's mind from the first century of the dispensation is a feature peculiar to Christianity. Those by whom God's truth began first to be fully declared were those by whom the revelation was completed. As they passed away revelations ceased to be vouchsafed, though providential guidance, as often as needed, the child of God may reckon on receiving. A reason for

this will readily suggest itself. The proper position of the Church on earth is that of expectancy—not of a fresh prophet to arise, but of the Lord Jesus to come at any moment into the air. Though the nearness or remoteness of that hour is known only to God, it is plain such a hope could never be really embraced as imminent, if we might lawfully look for fresh messengers to be sent to reveal still more of His will. Yet the Apostles do speak of the closing days of Christendom. The future was before them, and formed the subject of most earnest and inspired exhortations, not to bid saints wait for one who would be sent to communicate wisdom and Divine guidance in times of declension, but to insist on the sufficiency of the truth then communicated to meet the errors that would be rife. After the present parenthetic period of time has passed away—after the Lord's descent into the air for His saints—God will again deal directly with the Jews, the Gentiles, and the earth, and fresh revelations will be made by the instruments of His choice (Joel ii. 28; Rev. xi. 3). Till then the written Word is the perfect directory and repository for His people. From it we learn how to live, to walk, and to fight: in it we find all the truth God is pleased to lead us into whilst on earth.

Is this word sufficient for our wants? Can we rest on it as supplying all the guidance we require? Does it so anticipate the times in which we live as to equip us to cope with the errors of the day? Some who have turned to other sources for help would answer in the negative. If we give heed to Peter we shall answer in the affirmative, and learn from the use of it, in his second Epistle, what a richly stored armoury the Bible is; for, as inspired by the Holy Ghost, in anticipation of his decease, cognisant of the errors that would be rife before the Lord's return, he not only commends the Word of God to the saints as

their guide, but shows them how to make use of it.

There is a future for God's saints as well as for the ungodly : there will be a melting of the elements by heat. He keeps these things before them. For the saints the future he speaks of is the kingdom ; for the ungodly there remains judgment and perdition ; whilst dissolution will be the end of the material creation. All these events are intimately connected with the Lord's return to earth. Now the scoffers of the last days will openly deny the coming of the Lord. Peter, looking forward by the spirit of prophecy, admonishes his readers of that which will surely come to pass, and arms them for the teaching that will be prevalent by directing them to that Word of which these scoffers are wilfully ignorant. "Where is the promise of His coming?" they will ask. In speaking thus, they turn from God's Word to His works, and draw conclusions from what they observe in opposition to what they read. "Where is the promise of His coming?" Then there is a promise. The Word in which it is preserved is acknowledged as existing, but credence to what God has said is refused. "For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Creatures of a day, they set up their ideas as conclusive evidence of what they wish to be true. The course of nature, since the fathers fell asleep, has remained unchanged, they say ; and it must remain unchangeable is the thought of their heart. Now such reasoning may seem to some unanswerable, and the conclusions drawn from the examination of God's works irresistible ; but most material points are omitted in their calculation, viz., the origin of creation, and the power of Him who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and the fountains of waters : "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens

were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water." Created things took their form by the fiat of the Almighty. There was a beginning to the heavens and the earth; there may surely be an end. But further, "The world that then was (the orderly arrangement of things on earth) being overflowed with water, perished." Such is the history of the past recorded in the Word. The order of nature, as men speak, has been interrupted; it may be, therefore, again.

These scoffers, reasoning from what they see, draw conclusions about what must be. The present stability of created things is for them an indication of what must ever be. We may be sure, they would say, of what must be from what has been. They speak of the beginning of creation, of the unvarying condition of things from that time to this. Peter here meets them on their own ground, and thus enables us to challenge their conclusions. He, too, can speak of the beginning of creation, and bear witness to the possibility of an interruption, as they would call it, of the unvarying order of nature. God has before interposed in judgment; He will, He must again if men refuse to hearken to His Word, and to submit to His Son. Is it strange that He should act in judgment, though it is His strange work? "He spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment." Nor is it angels only who have felt the power of His anger, for He has dealt judicially with man also. He spared not the angels. "He spared not the old world, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." And again, at a later date, "turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes, He condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly." These interpositions of judgment



have been, for the Word records them, and no other source of information is open to us from which to learn about them. The value of God's Word, then, is great, and just meets the silly conclusions of misguided men. What took place before the flood, and unseen by man, is first narrated by Peter and Jude. What happened when Noah was alive is circumstantially and truthfully only to be found in the Bible. The catastrophe of the days of Abraham has found no historian to record it but the lawgiver of the former dispensation.

These acts of judgment attest the power and unchangeableness of the Almighty; but the example of Sodom and Gomorrha will be lost on these foolish reasoners—scoffers at God's truth. He has punished both angels and men; no creature endowed with intelligence is beyond the reach of His arm; the fallen angels and lost souls alike await their final doom. Concerning those beings who fell—the reason of it, their present condition and future prospects, all are related clearly though concisely. What a rebuke to man's self-conceit is this account of the angels that sinned! Man thinks he knows, or can find out everything, and reasons as if he must be right, even at the expense of God's faithfulness and truth. An event of great importance is related centuries after it had occurred, and then not as a discovery just made, but as something with which the writer is quite conversant, and which men should be acquainted with, as a sure indication of God's action in the future.

If we think of this judicial intervention of the Almighty, all the oft-repeated assertions that mercy and love are attributes of the Divine Being at variance with the thought of God as a judge, are at once shown to be worthless; and, if we remember His statements about the flood, and the destruction of the cities of the plain, all the reasoning of ungodly

men from the supposed unchangeableness of created things is immediately refuted. We cannot read Peter or Jude and believe that God is too merciful to act in judgment. We cannot accept God's account of the flood and the cities of the plain, and affirm that the order of nature cannot be subjected to any deviation from its accustomed path.

But we rest not here, nor stand on deductions, however clear and true. We have not only discovered to us (in Gen. i.) what took place when the creation of man was still a thing of the future, but we have revealed, in this same Word, the coming judgment, and the manner and extent of it. "By the Word of God were the heavens of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water." Peter never witnessed this, yet he speaks of it as fully competent to declare it, and as perfectly acquainted with the subject in hand. He wrote these words, yet they are not his; he was the scribe, but the Holy Ghost is the Author, who sets forth what really was, and what will yet be seen. By the Word of God the heaven and the earth were created; by "that same Word are they kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." How the littleness of man is at once made apparent when these subjects are brought forward! He can discover, for that is within the range of his mental powers, that vast changes have passed over this globe; but its origin and destined end are both equally beyond his ken; for his knowledge of both the one and the other he must consent to be indebted to revelation. There are subjects with which a child may be familiar, which all the learning of man could never find out. Thus Peter takes us to the written Word—the weapon given us to wield under the teaching of the Spirit. We need weapons when in conflict, and we need to learn how to use them. Peter here shows us what

the weapon is, and showing us, too, how to wield it, makes plain the value of the sword which is put into our hand. Like the smooth stone of David's choice—a missile of God's providing—instead of the armour of Saul (instruments of man's devising), we have, in the Word of God, a sword which demolishes at one stroke all the finely-spun web of the enemy. The heavens and the earth will pass away when the fire of Divine judgment shall be kindled. At the flood, the world that then was perished. By and by the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Nothing that has been seen could lead man to look for this. As ever with God, He has resources within Himself, and methods of acting peculiar and unthought of by us.

The ungodly were willingly ignorant of the Word. Peter would not let the saints be ignorant of this one thing—that years with the Eternal One are as a moment. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." If the disobedient deny the possible fulfilment of His promise, believers must remember that it is His promise (ver. 9). And here the Apostle reminds us of what is involved in the assertion of these scoffers, as he takes up the language of the prophetic scriptures, and connects His coming, which these will deny, with the day of the Lord—a theme so frequently dwelt on. Are the statements of the Old Testament as to that day to be discarded? Impossible! "The day of the Lord will come as a thief, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Such, in substance, have been the predictions of the prophets (Psalm cii. 26; Isaiah li. 6, lxvi. 22), which the Apostle affirms will have a most literal accomplishment. He had spoken, in the first chapter of

this epistle, of the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament as a light shining in a dark place, to which they should give heed, till the day dawn and the day star arise in their hearts. If they hearkened to these scoffers they must abandon all this, and be as a vessel on the ocean, without a rudder or a compass. It might seem but a little thing to give up one point about the future. But surrendering one is really surrendering all, because each prophecy is but a link of one great chain. If the promise of His coming was given up, the hopes of the day of the Lord and all connected with it must be abandoned likewise. It is well to see this, and learn what really is involved in the question of these unbelievers.

Keeping to the written Word we can meet these men, and resist them; but we can do more. Amid the dissolving of the heavens by fire, and the melting of the elements by fervent heat, we can, by faith, descry new heavens and a new earth, taking shape according to the will of the Creator. "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth." He has promised to come; He has promised new heavens and a new earth. God has graciously engaged Himself, in an immutable way, to perform what the Word speaks of. How far from God must souls be when they throw discredit on His promises.

But the Word proceeds further, and gives us the characteristic of that blessed future, abiding righteousness. Injustice, fraud, oppression, lawlessness, characterise our day; abiding righteousness will characterise the eternal state, "according to His promise." Here is a foundation for the soul to stand on. Created things, however stable they may appear, will be dissolved and burnt up, for He has promised to return to earth, after which these judgments will be executed. New heavens and a new earth shall be made and

remain for ever, for He has promised this likewise (Isaiah lxvi. 22). And here is the true solution of what would otherwise be incomprehensible. Could we suppose Satan could mar God's fair creation, and thwart His designs for ever? That would be to exalt Satan above God. So, if any are stumbled by the present success of the enemy, they have only to turn to the Word, and there learn the end of it all. He who once created the heavens and the earth will act again. He who was seen in the beginning by His works to be God will be seen at the end to be the same. Divine power will again be put forth, and new heavens and a new earth appear, never to be defiled by the hateful presence of the evil one.

As to the past and the future, our only guide is the written Word. But what of the present? Shall these scoffers ensnare souls because the Lord tarrys, and use with success the fact of the delay as an argument which shall throw the unwary off their balance? Here, too, the Word comes in, and Peter shows us the value of it. It reveals the reason of the delay. The Apostle states it in verse 9, and refers to the epistles of Paul in confirmation of it (verse 15). It is not to tradition, or the voice of the church, or the deductions of men, however holy they might be, that he would direct us; but as he has taught us the value of the written Word he would still direct us to it, as he adduces the writings of Paul in witness of the truth, "that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation." It is not slackness to fulfil His promise that causes the apparent delay, not indifference, but long-suffering—not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. This is the true key to His long tarrying, to which all would do well to take heed. For whilst of the fallen angels we read of none that were spared, God did preserve Noah and his family through the flood, and delivered Lot and

his two daughters, and would have saved all his family if they had been willing. For fallen man there is a way of escape from the impending doom, and hence the Lord tarries. Thus not only the acts of God are the subjects of revelation, but His motives too; for, as we could not divine beforehand how He would act, nor discover without a revelation what He did before man was created, we should never have discerned the real reason of the continuance of the Lord's absence. Of the past, the present, and the future, we learn from the written Word; and the past affords a clue to the future, because it is the acting of God, not of man, the sport of circumstances, with which we are concerned.

And, as this Word is a guide to God's counsels, so, when speaking of these scoffers, it furnishes us with the explanation of their opposition; they walk after their own lusts—self, not the Lord Jesus, is their object. The Lord shut out of their heart, they would exclude Him from His place on earth, and persuade others that His coming, taught by the Apostles, cannot take place. The secrets of their actions being exposed, the needed corrective is supplied to the saints. Seeing that the dissolution of created things will take place, holy conversation and godliness should be manifested. The scoffers may scoff at the thought of His return; the righteous should look for and hasten His coming, and, forewarned of the errors that would be abroad, they should grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus using the Word, as Peter teaches us, what a thought it suggests of the wisdom, power, and grace of God. He knew eighteen hundred years ago what Satan would suggest to men in the end of the days, and supplied His people, by the written Word, with the fitting armour. His power as exercised, His power as it will be exercised, are traced out before us,

and the reason of His apparent non-intervention in the affairs of earth is made known.

Outside the limits of revelation we need not travel for weapons with which to contend with these enemies to the truth, nor for a shield with which to defend ourselves from their assaults: all has been foreseen and provided for. With such a guide, the living and abiding Word of God, whilst we can track God's steps in the past, and learn the reason of the Lord's continued absence, we await with fullest confidence and certainty God's action in the future; and, where all is dark to the man of the world, there is light for the simple believer.

