

How do we regard the Bible?

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In the conflict between the truth of God and the lie of the devil between faith and unbelief, the attitude which we adopt towards the Holy Scriptures is decisive — **decisive as regards ourselves**. The Book, and the God who inspired it are quite unmoved by our thoughts and words.

If an airman, flying over the Himalayas, regards Everest's mighty mass as an illusion, and steers straight into it, he will not move Everest an inch. He will only move himself and his machine in disastrous fashion; and the way he regarded the mountain will prove quite decisive to him and to the result of his flight.

Ever since the Bible reached completion in the apostolic age it has been the object of attacks. For long it was removed from the common people and buried in monasteries and the like. Since the Reformation it has been widely circulated, but then began denials and criticism. The mode of attack has varied, but more recently, especially in religious circles, the fashionable thing has been to eulogize it as literature, as a repository of beautiful religious conceptions and a story of religious progress, whilst impeaching its real veracity, and undermining its authority as the Word of God.

Years ago we received a pamphlet, bearing the same title as this article, which summarized such teachings in small compass. It emanated from the "Social Problems Committee" of a certain "Church," so went forth under the sanction of a religious organization.

No reader of our magazine would find much fault with its opening words: —

"We Christians love our Bible. As life goes on most of us come to love it more and more. We go to it in sorrow and find comfort. We go to it in perplexity and find light. We go to it when we are weary and find inspiration. It never fails us. It is out of our own experience that we call it, 'The word of Life.'"

Here are some quite nice sentiments, which our author undertook to express on behalf of Christians generally. We love our Bible, he stated, because of certain benefits it gives - comfort, light and inspiration — he did not state that we love it because it is **true**. He did not believe it to be true, as we shall see. Such benefits are indeed good and desirable, if they are true, as proceeding from TRUTH. If not, they are but destructive opiates for the soul.

A pamphlet advocating Spiritism might begin in similar fashion, "We spiritists love our seances," and proceed to eulogise their effects in similar words, ending, "They never fail us." But at this point many would wish to interrupt and observe that possibly spiritists do find what they claim in their seances, but that the supreme test is not the subjective effect produced in the devotees of any cult but the truth or falsity of the cult to which they are devoted. Exactly! We agree as to the comforting properties of the Bible, but also affirm that there are, sad to say, a number of false cults which, implicitly believed, also exert a similar effect. We ask, why applaud the Bible and reject them?

To such a question we should give immediate answer, because the Bible is **true**, and they are **false**. Our author, however, had no such logical reason for his choice, since for him the Bible also could not be said to be true. And so, having opened his pamphlet in this pleasing way, he proceeded to give what he called, "blunt answers to blunt questions."

"Do we hold that every word in the Bible is true? No! we do not. Do we accept the views of the

Bible on scientific questions? No, we do not. Do we approve all the moral sentiments expressed in the Bible? No! certainly not. Do we regard the Bible as infallible history? No. Do we agree with all the opinions of St. Paul? No! we do not."

Our author was not alluding to the fact that here and there in Scripture we have words and sentiments of evil men and even of Satan recorded; and that obviously such words and sentiments are not to be accepted as of God. No. He just stated that he and his friends did not believe the Bible to be true and trustworthy, either as to its **words**, its **views**, its **moral sentiments**, its **histories**, or its **opinions**; and if so, there is left no respect at all in which it can be said to be true.

Thus he asserted, as though he spoke for Christians generally. But there are Christians in their tens of thousands, who utterly repudiate such weak and illogical unbelief. Leaving that aside, however, let us address ourselves to the main question. Ought we, or ought we not, to accept the Bible in its words, its views, its moral sentiments, its histories, its opinions, and we would add, its **assumptions**, as true? Let us allow the Bible to propound to us concerning itself the very question that the Living Word addressed to His critics, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin? and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" (John 8: 46).

Take that tremendous Bible **assumption**, "Thus saith the Lord," repeated over and over again. Now, did the Lord say, or did He not say? **If He did say**, then to treat anything He said after the fashion of our author is undiluted blasphemy; and **if He did not say**, then to talk about anyone deriving comfort or inspiration from such deceitful utterances is to advocate a very silly form of sentimental, not to say, immoral religion. Nor would it improve the case by urging that the men who prefaced their writings with, "Thus saith the Lord," or its variant forms, were good men, who genuinely thought they had a divine commission; for it is not the **good men** but their **bad writings**, that we are to derive comfort from!

Now, what underlies the flagrant unbelief expressed in this pamphlet? The steady refusal to see anything in the Bible beyond purely human literature; the acknowledgment of nothing in the nature of a revelation from God, but only of the evolution of religious ideas in the minds of successive generations of men. Here are the words: —

"What then is the Bible to us? It is simply the story of how through long centuries men gradually worked their way from primitive religious ideas and very primitive moral ideas up to the loftiest heights of spiritual perception which the race has attained."

"Israel began with what we should call pagan ideas about God. They believed in many gods, and about their own special god they believed some very strange things. They held him capable of such feelings as jealousy and the desire for revenge. They believed he **could be pleased by animal sacrifices**. They thought He cared for one nation and could take pleasure in seeing others massacred. And yet, slowly and surely, such thoughts were left behind. Slowly they learnt to fill out the idea of His righteousness with ever nobler content. They rose to a belief in His mercy, and then in His love . . . And as this progress went on they discarded their earlier ideas. Many of the earlier conceptions in the Bible stand condemned by the later teaching of the Bible itself."

Having read these statements, which purport to be instruction as to the true character and value of Old Testament Scripture, we have just our one question to ask as to them. ARE THEY TRUE;

They are NOT true to the facts as stated by Scripture. That can easily be verified. According to the Bible, Israel did **not** begin with pagan ideas of God. Israel himself and his immediate descendants had the knowledge of the true and only God. At a later stage in Egypt they evidently

caught the infection of Egyptian idolatry to a considerable extent. From this they were again to some degree extricated by the wonders of Sinai and the law then given. Their subsequent history was the exact opposite to the picture drawn by our author. Not a steady upward evolution of religious ideas, but a steady degradation to the depths of polytheism until the Babylonian captivity, only relieved by the faithful intervention of prophets sent by the Lord. And after the captivity, though they avoided idolatry, they degraded religion into a mere matter of ceremonies and pharisaic observances, that was sternly denounced by our Lord. This, we repeat, is simply beyond all contradiction the plain testimony of the Bible. The only increasing light to which it bears witness is the increasing clearness of prophetic testimony to the Coming One, which culminated in the COMING ONE Himself the Lord Jesus.

Whence, then, did our author get all these assertions as to how Israel's ideas were evolved? Is there some other history of the chosen race extant, of such unimpeachable accuracy that he felt himself authorised entirely to rewrite their story? **If there were**, it would be honest of him to have denounced our Bible as untrue, and to have said, "We Christians despise our Bible;" rather than foist upon it statements that it contradicts. **There is, however, no such other history.** His statements represented the account of things fashionable in speculative circles where evolution is still the rage. He just moved with the times and advocated the latest evolutionary philosophy. He told us he loved the Bible, but he loved his philosophic notions more, and in their favour he handled, "the word of God deceitfully," and thus he corrupted, "the word of God " (1 Cor. 4: 2; 1 Cor. 2: 17).

To him, of course, it was not the Word of God, for in the pamphlet he spoke of it as "writing the world has produced."

He was pleased, however, to approve of "Jesus." Here are his words:-

"The summit of all this progress is reached when we come to the person and teaching of Jesus. It is to that that all the earlier parts lead up. In Jesus we have the perfect revelation at last. He is all the best we ever dreamed that God might be. He is the final and complete picture of what God is. His teaching is the final word about the will of God for man. He satisfies perfectly man's craving for knowledge about God. And, therefore, the book that tells us about Him must necessarily be mankind's most sacred possession."

A number of these statements are true, and yet the whole passage exemplifies how truth may be used to decorate falsehood. The main idea is that "Jesus" is the summit of human progress. The race had been striving upwards, and its dreams of goodness were consequently in advance of anything yet attained, when, lo! as the fruit of this evolution there appeared "Jesus" and fulfilled our dreams.

Now for our question — **Is this a FACT?** Not if the Gospels be true. They show us that instead of the Lord Jesus appearing as the summit of human progress, fulfilling human dreams of goodness, in which case He would have been rapturously acclaimed by all the leaders of this progress; it was precisely "the princes of this world" who "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2: 8). Isaiah's prediction, "when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" was fulfilled.

Had our author access to some other document more reliable than the Gospels that enabled him to recast the story? He had not. There is no other authentic history. Either he was unable to read the sober objective facts of the Gospels without importing into them ideas from his own subjective consciousness, or he so questioned their veracity that he felt at liberty thus fundamentally to alter the story. He fashioned a "Jesus" after his own ideas, and not once in his pamphlet did he speak of Him as his LORD.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect and final revelation of God, because He is God. He is not the

fairest and most perfect expression of the desires and genius of Adam's race. He is the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, the Head of a new race (see, 1 Cor. 15: 45-49).

This quotation from an Epistle would not count for much with our author, of course. In his paper he proceeded to explain that the Old Testament, though hardly needed by us, has at least **some** value, as an interesting story of the preparation for Christ. So too, the Epistles "are of value because they fill out our knowledge of Christ;" but he did not regard them as authoritative.

The Apostle John declared otherwise. Writing of the false spirits in the world — the spirit of antichrist — he said, "We [The inspired apostles] are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error " (1 John 4: 6). Which spirit pervaded this pamphlet? Its author considered the apostolic epistles as open to question in many things, and the verses just quoted would be to him just John's opinions, which we need not follow. But judging by that sentence of the Word of God through John, he was deluded by "the spirit of error."

Now what is the upshot of this way of regarding the Bible? A closing quotation shall tell us:-

"From all this it must be plain that the Bible, which Christians love so much, and which proves so invaluable for life, is not the whole Bible. It is the greatest thoughts of the Bible, which feed our souls and refresh our spirits. Possibly the amount of Scripture which is thus living, and which actually operates in the lives of some Christians, might turn out to be little more than a tenth of the whole . . . Probably every reader makes his own Bible. The parts that do not grip him he passes by."

A few more lines followed, containing a pleasing sentiment or two about the Bible, and the pamphlet thus closed as it opened; bestowing its blessing upon the venerable Book!

A few more lines followed, one-tenth of the Bible's contents of any real use. The remaining nine-tenths can be discarded. No assurance is given as to which tenth is of use. We are left at liberty to make our own choice. So "we Christians," who "love our Bibles" are left each loving a different "Bible" — each loving what is totally condemned in part by the majority of other "Christians." We are thus presented with the melancholy spectacle of "Christians," every one of whom on a majority vote of other "Christians" would be condemned as foolishly credulous. If this were really the position, who would not be an out-and-out infidel!

We do not know whether the author included Luke 24 in his "Bible." He professed admiration for the "Jesus" of the Gospels, though why he should it is hard to tell, since we owe the Gospels, as we do the Epistles, to apostles or men under their influence. If these are not to be relied upon in their Epistles, why trust them as to "Jesus" in the Gospels? Have we then anything left that is reliable as to Him?

It may be however that he did include Luke 24 in his "Bible," which is one-tenth of our Bible; and so he might yet have read that chapter, and noted what our Lord Jesus said, when He was raised from the dead:-

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets have spoken."

"Beginning at Moses and ALL the prophets He expounded unto them in ALL the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

"ALL things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me."

The issue between the Lord Jesus and the writer of this deceitful pamphlet is complete. Had it

been openly and honestly infidel we should hardly have noticed it in our pages. Its danger lies not in its negations but in its smooth professions of admiration. The "Jesus" of the author's imagination was eulogised in order the better to deny to the Bible its true character as inspired or "God-breathed" writings, bringing us A REVELATION FROM GOD. Did not the kiss of Judas prove of old a more effective device than the swords and staves of the multitude?

We welcome the opportunity at the start of another year, by reviewing this pamphlet of years ago, to make manifest once more our glad and humble acceptance of the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God. We consequently desire that it may have an ever increasing weight of authority in our own hearts and in the hearts of all our readers. As a result of this may we be preserved not only from **taking anything from it, but** also from **adding to it** anything claiming to be a fresh "inspiration," or "revelation," from God, no matter from what quarter it may be proffered to us.