

"Patience and comfort of the scriptures"

F. B. Hole.

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The Holy Scriptures present to us the truth of God in a way that is designed to bring the power of it to bear upon our state and behaviour. A good deal of history is woven into the Old Testament, but only so much as will illuminate the ways of God and impart deep lessons of a moral character. Again, in the Gospels only that is recorded of our Lord as will give us a four-fold portrait of Him, and of God the Father revealed in Him.

So also, in the Acts of the Apostles we are permitted to see the workings of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles and others, which brought about the practical transition from Judaism to Christianity in its proper character. And in the Epistles we have the full truth ministered to us; but never in a merely theoretical way, as though it was a mental scheme of Divine philosophy. All the truth made known is applied to the state and behaviour of the saints so that the power of it shall affect our lives and bring them into conformity to the will of God.

This is particularly noticeable in the Epistle to the Romans, where Romans 12 to 15 are full of directions and exhortations based upon the truth of the Gospel, unfolded in the earlier chapters. It is there that we get the great verse, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15: 4).

The allusion here is clearly to the Old Testament Scriptures, for there it is that we find the things written "aforetime." They had their bearing of course upon the generations that first received them, but also God had us in view, when they were given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They are for our learning, but that learning is not to be academic — the mere acquisition of right information — but very practical. It is to promote **patience**, or endurance, to minister **comfort, or** encouragement, and to imbue us **with a hope** that endures. And if that can be said in regard to the Old Testament Scriptures, it can be asserted with even more emphasis in regard to the New Testament.

How impatient and unenduring we are by nature! The world is full of men in a hurry to reach their objectives, whether good, bad or indifferent. The same spirit is manifested all too often by true saints of God, who want to reach what is right and scriptural, and yet pursue it in fleshly energy without giving God time to act and bring it about in the power of His Spirit. We must not forget that in 2 Corinthians 12: 12, the first thing mentioned as being a sign of an apostle, even before wonders and mighty deeds, is "all patience." Now if we learn rightly from the "things written aforetime" we shall see how God reaches His end with infinite patience, and often through what looks like defeat, for He is "the God of patience," as the next verse of Romans 15 says. It will engender patience in us.

This will introduce us to the comfort or encouragement of which the Scriptures are so full. The outlook in the world is very black. In the church the outlook cannot be called encouraging. Be it so, yet God is "the God of consolation," or of comfort, and therefore the Scriptures are full of that comfort for the man of faith, for the simple reason that they set before us God Himself. Meditating upon the Scriptures we get our eye fixed upon God, what He has done in Christ and what He yet will do. Then it is that in our thoughts man shrinks into his proper insignificance, and God revealed in Christ shines forth in all His sufficiency before our spiritual eyes.

Then through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we "might have hope." To this point we are conducted in spite of the disillusionment that fills the world. The history of the world is really just a

record of blighted hopes, and if we look abroad in the world today what basis is there on which to rest any hope, since mankind is obviously sinking into a state of mass brutality, unheard of since the world began.

Alone amongst men, the man of faith has a basis for his hope which cannot be shaken. The God whom he knows is the "God of hope" (Rom. 15: 13), to whom he has been introduced by the Spirit through the Scriptures. While we wait for the coming of the Lord, which will be the consummation of all our hopes, let us give the Scriptures, and the truth that they minister to us, a commanding place in all our thoughts.