

The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

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FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH

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Foreword

The reader of this little book is asked to remember that its pages deal with THE FAITH, since for "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" we are bidden by Jude to "earnestly contend."

THE FAITH is a God-given title of Christianity. It is not a science, i.e., knowledge arrived at by human investigation and reasoning, but "the faith," because founded on revelation which faith receives.

It has been "DELIVERED TO" the saints, not reasoned out by them.

And, delivered ONCE, in its perfect form, and hence we are not left to enlarge or improve upon it, but simply to contend earnestly for it lest its purity and truth be impaired.

The foundations of the faith are of prime importance. We do not pretend to survey them all in this little volume, hence we do not call it "THE Foundations of the Faith." Yet as all that we do survey is fundamental in its nature we have adopted the less pretentious title of FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAITH, and may God be pleased to use our little book to root and ground believers in the truth.

The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible.

Of all those great items of scriptural truth which are fundamental in their character, the one which

forms our present theme stands first, for the simple reason that whatever may have been the excellence and authority of those revelations of God and of His will originally delivered orally by our Lord and His apostles, except we have, now that they are gone, those revelations conveyed to us in writings, divinely inspired and therefore of full authority, we have nothing worthy of being called THE FAITH today. At best we should have had but an ill-assorted mass of recollections and traditions, handed on from generation to generation. Until therefore the inspiration and authority of the Bible are fully and firmly settled in our souls, it is hardly worth proceeding to establish from its pages those further truths which at first sight may appear to be of a still more fundamental character.

Let us open the Bible, then, with the simple thought of ascertaining what it has to say about itself, and what are its claims.

In the Old Testament three things strike us. First, that in the opening chapters we are told of things completely outside the range of the observation of any human writer, things indeed clean outside any knowledge that could be possessed apart from a divine revelation, since happenings before man's creation are recounted; and further, that these things are stated not in terms befitting human speculation but with the quiet ring and assurance of absolute knowledge, and therefore of truth.

Secondly, in all the historical books we find features utterly unknown in all human histories. We may specify such a feature as the complete absence of all hero worship. Men, indeed, there are, approved of God, but even so their failings are recounted, just as any commendable feature in the worst of men is mentioned; and all with a lofty detachment from human passions and prejudices, with an impartial and serene judgment which is found only in God Himself. Or, again, we notice that matters, that we never should have even mentioned, are dwelt upon at considerable length — such as the passages Judges 17, 18: 14-26, and 1 Samuel 1: 4 to 2: 11 — while things we should have thought worthy of much notice are ignored; for instance, the great earthquake in the reign of Uzziah is never mentioned historically, and we should have no knowledge that the great catastrophe happened were it not for two passing allusions in Amos and Zechariah. The historical books, in short, are only "history" in so far as its recital serves the purpose of illuminating the purposes or the ways of God.

Thirdly, in the prophets we cannot but feel the directness of their appeal. No hesitation, no apologies; but the most direct and emphatic "Thus saith the Lord" repeated again and again. The Word of God came through their lips and pens, and its powerful appeal to heart and conscience is perceptible today in the hostility their words still awaken in sinful men, as well as in the way of subduing men's hearts with a view to their ultimate blessing.

When we reach the New Testament, we find plain endorsements of the inspiration and authority of the Old, first from the lips of our Lord Himself (Matt. 4: 4, 7, and 10; Matt. 5: 17; Mark 12: 24; Mark 14: 21; Luke 4: 21; Luke 16: 31; Luke 24: 25, 27, 44-46; John 5: 46, 47; John 10: 35), and then from the Evangelists in their frequent references to the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture in the life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. "That it might be fulfilled," "That the scripture might be fulfilled," are words that we read over and over again. In the epistles, too, we have inspiration clearly claimed for the Old Testament writers in such passages as 2 Timothy 3: 15-17; 1 Peter 1: 10-12, and 2 Peter 1: 19-21.

What about the New Testament? is the question which may now be asked. In its pages the Old is clearly endorsed and treated as inspired of God, but does it claim or assume inspiration equally for itself? The answer is — Yes.

The New, be it remembered, has come to us from the pens of some of the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, and their co-labourers. In 1 Corinthians 2: 13 we have the Apostle Paul claiming

inspiration for verbal utterances of his own and of the other apostles when conveying the truths of Divine revelation. In 1 Corinthians 14: 37 he asserts that his writings are "the commandments of the Lord." In 2 Peter 3: 15, 16 we have the Apostle Peter corroborating the epistles of Paul and putting them on a par with "the other scriptures."

Further, in the introductory verses to his Gospel, we have Luke claiming a "perfect understanding of all things from the very first," and also that he wrote "in order" or "with method," so that in result Theophilus might "*know the certainty*" of the things he had previously received. We have the Apostle John in his first epistle declaring that he *wrote* it so that believers might "*know*" that they had eternal life (Luke 5: 13). Both these statements assume for the writings in question a certainty and authority which only inspiration can account for. In the Revelation we have the Apostle John receiving the revelation, bearing record of it, and in result producing "the words of this prophecy" (Rev. 1: 1-3), and finally pronouncing a solemn curse on any who should dare to tamper with those "words" as originally given (Rev. 22: 18, 19). Here, again, inspiration — *verbal* inspiration — is assumed.

These scriptures are quite sufficient to show that the New Testament writers while asserting the inspiration of the Old assume it in equal measure for themselves; and that therefore while the Holy Scriptures, which Timothy knew from his childhood's days — according to 2 Timothy 3: 15 — were the Old Testament writings, the "all scripture" of the next verse covers all those writings which we know as the Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," or "is God-breathed." A remarkable expression that! Just as in creation the finely wrought vessel of clay — for "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" — became a living entity only after God's in-breathing — for He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" — so what would otherwise have been but a collection of literary fragments has by the fact of God in-breathing every part become one organic whole; living and powerful indeed, since it is the inspired Word of God.

1 Corinthians 2 is perhaps the most striking chapter bearing upon this subject, for here we are permitted to see the process that God has been pleased to ordain for the communication of His thoughts to His people. Here are three distinct steps and a distinct action of the Holy Spirit of God in connection with each.

The first step is that of REVELATION. The things prepared of God for those that love Him, things unseen, unheard, and unimagined by man, have been made known by the Spirit of God, who is thoroughly competent for such work, as the end of verse 10 shows. Verse 11 goes further, and declares that the Spirit of God is the *only possible* source of such revelations.

Now these Spirit-given revelations reached, not the world, not even all saints, but the apostles and prophets (see Eph. 3: 5), who are the "us" of verse 10; and having received them they proceeded to convey them to others. Hence the "we" of verse 13 indicates the "us" of verse 10.

The second step, then, is that of INSPIRATION. God took care that the apostles and prophets should convey these revelations to others under supervision of a direct and divine kind. They were not left, so verse 13 teaches, to exercise their own wisdom as to the best way of stating the truth, but were guided by the Holy Spirit in the exact words they used.

Thirdly comes the step of APPROPRIATION. The truth having been revealed to men chosen of God, and by them communicated in inspired words, it must now be received or appropriated if it is to have an enlightening and controlling effect upon men. Of this verse 14 speaks. No natural man, i.e., man in his natural or unconverted condition, can possibly receive these things. He totally lacks the faculty that would enable him to receive them. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Believers have "the mind of Christ," and have received the Spirit of God that they may "know the things that are freely

given to us of God."

When we speak then of *Revelation*, we think of that work of the Spirit of God by which knowledge and thoughts which are purely divine are conveyed to the minds and hearts of men chosen of God.

When we speak of *Inspiration* we refer to that second work of the Spirit of God by, which those men were enabled to set forth the revealed truth in words divinely chosen and therefore of divine fulness and precision, whether they spoke or whether they wrote them.

Revelation is concerned with the transference of truth from the mind of God to the minds of apostles and prophets, so that the conception and understanding of it might be theirs.

Inspiration is concerned with the transference of the same truth from the minds of the apostles and prophets to all the saints, and for this not merely thoughts but words were needed. But if human words are to be the proper expression of divine truth they must be chosen and used with perfect fitness and accuracy, and this was secured by the action of the Holy Ghost. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1: 21).

The word translated "moved" in that passage means "carried" or "borne along." These holy men of Old Testament times spake, as borne along by the Holy Spirit.

Take Jeremiah, for instance. It may be quite true that a certain tone and style marks his writings so that any man of literary discernment and familiar with the contents of the Bible may usually recognize them wherever quoted; still, the Spirit of God was the power that bore his mind along the flowing current of God's will, and so controlled his writing that both thoughts and words were God's.

Sometimes, indeed, this action of the Holy Spirit took so powerful a form as to overleap necessary limitations that existed in the mind of the prophet in question, and caused him to write things the real and full meaning of which he knew not: and so it came to pass that some, if not all, the writers of Old Testament scripture had to enquire and search diligently concerning the meaning of that which they themselves had written. The Spirit of Christ in them had been signifying in their writings matters concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glories, to follow. In answer to their search it was further revealed to them that they were writing for the benefit of saints in the future — the saints of the present dispensation. This being so, the full import of their inspired writings necessarily remained vague and indistinct to their own minds. There was full inspiration, but no full revelation save to future generations. 1 Peter 1: 10-12 tells us about this, and proves how powerful and real a thing *inspiration* is.

With this may be contrasted the kind of inspiration alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. In verse 19 he tells us that when giving inspired communications in the assemblies of the saints his object was to give *words with his understanding*, even if only five in number. He desired to speak of things which he intelligently apprehended in such a way that they were thoroughly intelligible to his listeners.

The kind of inspiration spoken of in 1 Peter 1: 10-12 largely characterized the *Old Testament* writers, and inasmuch as the prophets, who in these cases were the vehicles of the messages, were uninstructed as to the full purport of their words, it may be described, for want of a better term, as *unintelligent* inspiration.

The kind of inspiration mentioned in 1 Corinthians 2 is that which *almost* entirely characterizes the New Testament writings, and may by contrast be termed *intelligent* inspiration. The possible exception to the rule, which leads us to insert the word "almost" in the above statement, and italicize it,

is the case of some parts of the Revelation. It is quite likely that some of the visions and statements in that remarkable unveiling of the future were obscure to John the seer as they are to us, and that they will only stand out clear in their full and distinct meaning to saints of the coming tribulation period. The famous number 666 (Rev. 13: 18) is the most pronounced example of what we mean.

The above distinction may be helpful to those who would study the question a little more closely. It must never be overlooked, however, that whether unintelligent or intelligent, the fact and degree of inspiration is in both cases exactly the same.

But let us now turn to some questions frequently raised in connection with this subject.

What is the exact meaning of verbal inspiration, now so often derided even by professed ministers of the gospel; and do you believe in it?

The exact meaning is: Inspiration of such fulness that it extends to the control of the very words of the utterance or writing. Verbal is an adjective derived from the Latin *verbum* = a word. There are those who will allow a modified inspiration, extending as far as the *thoughts* are concerned; an inspiration differing in degree but hardly in kind from that state of mental exaltation and rapture which produced the finest passages from Shakespeare, Milton, or Dante.

We have to observe, however, first, that Scripture definitely makes its inspiration a matter of its *words* (1 Cor. 2: 13; Rev. 1: 3, Rev. 22: 18, 19), and, second, that an inspiration such as suggested extending only to the thoughts would be useless, as far as giving us authoritative Scriptures is concerned. To assure us that Paul and Peter and John had wonderful ideas given of God, but that they were, left without any divine guidance when it came to be a question of expressing those ideas for the benefit of others, is to take away with the left hand what is offered by the right.

You and I have no means of getting at those wonderful thoughts in Paul's mind save by the *words* in which he clothed them. The difficulty of putting the simplest and lowest thought into proper and adequate words is notorious, and without inspired words we have nothing inspired at all, whatever Paul may have had. To put it in another way: if we have not Scriptures verbally inspired we have no inspired Scriptures at all, and the Bible, though interesting and elevating, would not be AUTHORITATIVE. It is exactly this *authority* which the modern false teacher is out to destroy.

For ourselves it is enough that the Bible claims verbal inspiration for itself. We believe it.

What theory do you hold as to how verbal inspiration became effective; how did it work?

Quite a number of theories have been formed, but we hold none of them. We should no more think of forming a theory as to the exact working of inspiration than we should think of forming a theory as to other great mysteries of the faith, such as the truth of one God yet a Trinity of Persons, or the exact working of God's creatorial power in bringing worlds into being, or the exact mode in which the incarnation of our blessed Lord and Saviour became an accomplished fact. Instead, we admit frankly and at once that here are these great truths clearly revealed in Scripture, yet wholly supernatural and beyond our understanding. We do not expect to understand them; we accept them in faith. We are not troubled by finding these mysteries totally beyond our comprehension, but rather confirmed. It is

what we expect in a revelation which is *divine*. Did everything in Christianity fall within the compass of our minds — which, though renewed through grace, are still human — we should at once know it to be human in its origin. And this it is not; it is superhuman: it is of God.

What have you to say as to the continual accusations of inaccuracy and mistakes which are levelled at the Bible?

Just this: that if all the accusations ever brought could be collected together and classified we believe that a substantial majority would fall under the head of accusations founded upon sheer ignorance, intensified often by an admixture of cunning dishonesty. The favourite infidel question as to Cain's wife is an example of this large class. Such difficulties exist not in the Scriptures but purely in the minds of the people who raise them.

Setting aside all these, we believe that of the residue, a great majority again would prove to be genuine difficulties, but of a sort that careful and prayerful research gradually resolve into most instructive helps, often displaying much hidden beauty.

An example of this class is the statement about the fourteen generations in Matthew 1: 17. But we discover that the fourteen generations from David to the captivity is reached by omitting the names of the kings more immediately descended from the wicked Athaliah, the daughter of the yet more infamous Jezebel. Their names to the third generation are kept out of the genealogy. Thus the apparent error is found to be due to the fact that God's thoughts and ways and reckonings are not ours. If apostasy supervenes He does not count the generations affected by it.

A very small number of difficulties now remain to form the third class, which is composed of little discrepancies, the source of which cannot be discovered with certainty. An example of this class is the question of the age of Ahaziah when he came to the throne of Judah. 2 Kings 8: 26 states it as 22, while 2 Chronicles 22: 2 says 42. The error evidently crept in through a very early mistake in copying, but when and how we have no means of knowing.

The fact is, then, that most of these so-called mistakes are apparent only and not real, and the very few real ones are copyists' slips and the like on side matters of no vital importance.

Is it possible to maintain the inspiration of our Authorized version since a Revision has been issued as well as many other translations in English?

We do not maintain the inspiration of the Authorized or any other version and never have.

What we do maintain is as follows: —

1. That the Scriptures, as written in their original tongues, were given by inspiration of God, that inspiration extending to the words employed.

2. That by means of the large number of ancient manuscript copies of the Scriptures preserved to us in the providence of God, we possess a very accurate knowledge of the Scriptures as originally written, the words or passages as to which any doubt exists being very few and unimportant.

3. That the Authorized translation is on the whole very good and faithful in its rendering of the inspired original, but that it may be usefully compared with the Revised Version, and more especially

with the New Translation by the late Mr. J. N. Darby, to ensure even greater accuracy. Substantially, however, it gives us the inspired Word of God in trustworthy form.

What about the Revised Version of 2 Timothy 3: 16 — "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable" — Is that correct?

Pretty clearly it is not correct. In the original Greek the verb "is" does not occur at all, being understood, but not expressed. In English we must express it, and the question is as to where it should be inserted. There are eight other passages of similar construction in the New Testament, and each of these has been translated by the Revisers as in the Authorized Version. Only in 2 Timothy 3: 16 have they twisted the sentence round in this way. One of these eight Scriptures is Hebrews 4: 13. If we translated that according to the Reviser's rendering of our verse it would read: "All things that are naked are also opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do," which on the face of it would be absurd. Indeed, the Scripture in Timothy looks foolish as translated by the Revisers, inasmuch as they turn it into a statement of the perfectly self-evident truth that every God-breathed writing is good. *That* Timothy well knew; the assurance he needed in view of the apostles' departure was that "ALL scripture is God-breathed."

How do you account for the fact that the sayings of evil men have a place in the Bible; are these inspired?

By no means. It is easy, however, to account for them. The explanation lies in the difference between *revelation* and *inspiration*. Not all Scripture is direct revelation from God. Some of it is history in which the sayings of evil men and even of Satan are recorded. Again, a book like Ecclesiastes is largely the record of Solomon's thoughts and reasonings and disillusionments while seeking happiness in the gratification of his natural desires. Yet all is given to us by inspiration of God. We have divinely accurate accounts of what was done or said; and Solomon is led to record his mental struggles with such divine fitness as to be profitable for our warning and correction.

If an illustration of this be needed, turn to Ecclesiastes 2: 24: "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour." Is this a *revelation* from God? Is it God's voice telling us that food and drink are, after all, the highest good? Emphatically No! What, then? It is the divinely inspired record of the extreme folly to which the wisest of men may be led if he have no light above his natural reason and observation! — and how good of God to give us a peep at this in His inspired record.

Some people like just to open the Bible and take the first verse their eye falls upon as a direct message from God to them. Is this a right procedure?

Hardly. We are quite willing to believe that there have been occasions when people have in that way lighted on remarkable verses that have come to them with much point, yet any such haphazard method practised in a habitual way is unworthy of the inspired Word of God.

It is written not for the lazy, but for diligent searchers for truth and guidance like the Berean Jews (Acts 17), who read it in faith and dependence on God. Only thus do we, "rightly divide" (2 Tim. 2: 15)

its contents and obtain light and wisdom from God.