

A QUESTION CONSIDERED

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What is the highest authority to which an appeal can be made when doctrine, experience and practice are in controversy, so as to end the controversy? Is it experience or the Word of God?

Experience is the spiritual exercises of the mind, especially those feelings which follow upon, and are connected with, conversion. (See the Standard Dictionary).

The Word of God is what God has spoken to this world. He has spoken in divers manners, by the prophets, by His Son, and by his apostles, through all of them by the Holy Spirit, man being the agent the Holy Spirit used to do the speaking. What he has spoken he has caused to be written in a book, known among us as the Bible. In it is recorded a perfect revelation of God, of man, or human duty, and of human destiny. In it are recorded the mental states produced by sin, and the mental states which God produces in the soul. The revelation is so perfect that it will, if obeyed, make the "man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II. Tim. 3:17. The Holy Ghost moved the persons who wrote the Word of God (II. Peter 2:21), and the same Spirit leaves the soul of man to obey the truth thus given, and obedience to that truth through the Spirit culminates in the new birth and in heart purity. I. Peter 1:22-25. The question to be considered is this:

Are the feelings and mental states of the soul, called experience, which are received by us, and which lead to certain conclusions, the end of all controversy, or it is what God says, regardless of our experience? Which of these settles the correctness of doctrine, experience, and practice in our relations to God and man?

It seems incredible that any being, whether man or angel, should suppose for a moment, that his own experience, or mental states, could convey to his mind, or to the mind of any other person, a more correct knowledge of doctrine, experience, and practice than God can convey by his Word, and hence that experience is of higher authority than God's Word. If I did not find persons who are thus exalting experience above the Word, some who are declaring that the Bible is obsolete to themselves and all others who have received the Holy Ghost, and who, when shown what the Bible teaches on certain points, cast it all aside by saying, "That is not my experience, I am one who believes that 'experience is the end of all controversy,' 'the Holy Ghost has given me a different experience.' 'I am going by my experience.'" I say, if I did not find such persons I could not believe that they exist. They are doing by experience what the Jews did by tradition, making void the Word of God. When this is the case it is time to hold up the Word of God as being higher in authority than any experience that can come to the soul from any source, and that the knowledge which we get from God's Word is better, surer than knowledge conveyed to the mind through an experience or mental states, even though our experience is a religious experience, and is perfectly satisfactory to us. We can be mistaken, we can be deceived, God can be neither mistaken nor deceived, hence his Word is the fact in the case without any possibility of being otherwise. Any doctrine, experience, or practice, that will not stand the judgment of God's Word is not to be received as coming from God. All that comes from God is in harmony

with his Word, for the Holy Ghost uses the Word to produce it. The fact that I get a certain experience, because I believe certain things to be true, or as being Scriptural, does not settle the question as to the correctness or incorrectness of my views, and that therefore my experience is from God, so that upon the basis of my experience I may proclaim my views as truth and urge them upon others, and condemn them as sinners if they do not dance when I have piped, although the experience may be satisfactory to me.

No doctrine, experience or practice is to be declared true or righteous that cannot be clearly established by the Word of God. No experience or mental state is to be accepted as coming from God, or as having been wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost, unless it corresponds with the description God has given in his Word, of such mental states, when describing the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul, no matter how powerful the manifestations, or how pleasing to the sensibilities said experience may be. The Laodicean church members had an experience so pleasing to themselves that they said, "We are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing," yet according to the Word, they were on the road to ruin.

God in his Word, has recorded the revelation he has given of himself, of his character, of the work he purposes to do for the soul, both for us and in us. He has also given a minute description of the mental states, which the Holy Ghost produces in the soul in conviction, conversion, and in entire sanctification, so that when a spirit comes to God, as God, and proposes to do certain things, or teach others to do certain things, we may compare what said spirit says with the Word, or record, to see if they both speak the same thing. If the teaching or witnessing spirit does not correspond with the Word, it is not of God, no matter what it may claim to be. When a soul has an inward experience which corresponds with the description given in God's Word of such an experience the soul knows that the same Spirit who wrote the Word has also written in his heart, for he says the same thing in both places. When this is the case the soul knows that both the witnessing Spirit and the work is of God. In this way both the witnessing Spirit and the experience are tested by the Word of God. When the witnessing Spirit and a work are in accord with the Word of God, they are of God. When the work—experience—and the witnessing spirit contradict the Word of God neither of them are of God.

But some will say: "If I hold that certain views are Scriptural, and get an experience while holding such views, does not my experience establish the fact that my views are correct?"

By no means, unless the mental states, feelings, and experience correspond to what is written in the Word of God as belonging to the state we claim to be in, or that accompanies the work of grace we profess.

In order to show the dangerous character of this error let us look at both ways of testing truth in contrast:

Take the doctrine of justification, that act of God's grace by which man receives the pardon of sin, and is constituted a child of God. It is the belief of Mr. Moody and his co-workers, of all Calvinists, and not a few Arminianists, including some Methodists, that when a person becomes a child of God the seventh chapter of Romans is and will be

his experience. Thousands of persons believe this theory and claim to be the children of God, and base their claim upon the fact that they have an experience which corresponds to the seventh chapter of Romans, and that they received their experience under that theory, and therefore their experience proves this theory to be true. Now if getting an experience according to theory establishes the correctness of the theory, then it is, and can be, established beyond all controversy that the seventh chapter of Romans is the experience of a child of God. Mr. Moody thinks of nothing else, and teaches nothing else. He says: "People tell me sometimes that they have got out of the seventh chapter of Romans, but I notice they always get back there again. Some people seem to think they have got away from the flesh, and that they are soaring away in a sort of seventh heaven experience, but I notice they get back sooner or later." (See his sermon on the Two Adams). He explains the 6th, 7th and 8th chapters as descriptive of the life of a child of God, and says: "I do not see how any one can explain it any other way." His converts claim to be the children of God, and to get their experience according to that theory. That those who profess religion under his teachings have the mental states described in the seventh chapter of Romans it would be foolish to deny, but if they have no other mental states than these, I should certainly deny their conclusions, when they conclude that they are justified and are the children of God.

How will I establish the correctness of my denial? Not by an appeal to the experience of any one, but by the Word of God, by showing by that Word that the mental states, or experience, or practice described in the seventh chapter of Romans do not correspond with the mental states, experiences and practices which God's Word describes as belonging to the blessing of justification, and its corresponding life. The seventh chapter of Romans is descriptive of an experience produced in the soul by the Holy Spirit in the application of the law, but it is not that of a child of God. I do not say that no one is converted and becomes a child of God under the teaching of Mr. Moody, but I do mean to say that if they never have any other mental states or experiences than those described in Romans the seventh chapter they are not justified, hence are not the children of God. I do not say that a person must know before hand just what the Bible says about justification before he can be justified, but I do say that when a soul is justified he will have an experience that corresponds with the Bible description of that experience, and he will recognize it when he finds it in the Bible.—Wesleyan Methodist, 1899.

BIBLE HELPS

If you have the blues read the 23rd Psalm.

If your pocketbook is empty, read the 37th Psalm.

If you are losing confidence in men, read the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians.

If people seem unkind, read the 15th chapter of St. John.

If you are discouraged about your work, read the 126th Psalm.

If you find the world growing small and yourself great, read the 19th Psalm.

If you cannot have your way in everything, keep silent and read the 3rd chapter of James.

If you are all out of sorts, read the 11th chapter of Hebrews.