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PREACHING THE BIBLE

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Preaching presupposes a divine revelation. A preacher is not a philosopher or a scientist endeavoring to discover something more or less useful. Under a heavenly call, he is sent to expound and proclaim revealed truth delivered to him and not discovered by him. The most obscure messenger of Christ may say equally with St. Paul: "Though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." The gospel he must preach—that and nothing else. If he proposed nothing more than the utterance of his personal and changeable opinions, he would be under no such compelling necessity to speak. Both his obligation and his authority arise from the fact that a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto him. His ministry, therefore, if it is Christian, is founded on the word of the Lord, and it will be feeble or powerful in exact proportion to the weakness or strength of his conviction that God has revealed himself through Christ in the Holy Scriptures. Hence all the powerful preachers from the days of the apostles until now have been great believers in a divine revelation. With the Hebrew psalmist and the apostle to the Gentiles, they all, with one voice, declare: "We also believe and therefore speak."

Any impairment of a preacher's belief in the divine revelation enfeebles his ministry, and if not cured it eventually destroys the spiritual effects of his preaching. Herein is found the forcelessness of not a little preaching of the present day. Many weak men in the pulpit have lost their faith in the Bible at the bidding of strong critics in the lecture room. They accept, without hesitation, anything the critics declare, overlooking the fact that the critics themselves are not agreed and that their theories are in a state of perpetual flux. Some preachers, overawed by rationalizing critics, seem to have reached the conclusion that anything may be true provided it is not in the Bible, and their pulpit performances can, except by a strained courtesy, hardly be called preaching at all. These are they who berate all creeds, most naturally because they do not believe that there is any such thing as settled truth.

They are they also who lug into the pulpit all sorts of themes that have no remotest relation to the gospel of Christ. Instead of feeding hungry souls with the bread of life they spread before the people all sorts of wild stuff, until discerning souls turn away in disgust, or cry with some of the old who had set before them poisonous pottage: "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot."

Men of this type vainly imagine that something has happened in the Bible in recent years to make it less believable and less avail-

able for spiritual purposes. Nothing could be further from truth. More and more, the Bible is being confirmed daily by the discoveries of the archaeologists, and these confirmations have been multiplying.

Theories of "subjective criticism," which frighten some timid preachers, are as old as Celsus, whom Origen refuted with overwhelming force. Nothing has happened to the Bible to justify any diminution of confidence in it. It is just what it has been, and just what it always will be to the end of time. If it could be overthrown preaching would have to cease and churches would have to be abandoned.

Years ago, Matthew Arnold, notwithstanding his rationalizing tendencies, said: "To the Bible men will return, and why? Because happiness is our beings end and aim, and happiness belongs to righteousness, and righteousness is revealed in the Bible. For this simple reason, men will return to the Bible, just as a man who tried to give up food, thinking it was a vain thing and he could do without it, would return to food, or a man who tried to give up sleep, thinking it was a vain thing and he could do without it, would return to sleep."

Through inspired lawgivers, seers, psalmists, prophets and apostles belonging to the Hebrew people God has given mankind this Book of books. It has no parallel or likeness "the lonely book of a lonely people." It is idle to seek to qualify or explain away the supernatural quality which pervades it and which has been justly described by the word "inspiration." If it be not inspired, how shall we account for its immeasurable superiority to all other literatures?

But some will say, "There is a human element in it." How could God have spoken to men at all if he used an inhuman method of revelation? To reach and redeem mankind, the eternal Son had to become incarnate. The all-important fact is, God has spoken; he has broken silence with the revelation of redeeming love. "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The Christian church and the Christian gospel are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

Another will say: "The Bible is a record of the experience of its writers." Quite so. But did they or did they not experience inspiration? The prophets were accustomed to say that "the word of the Lord" came to them. Did they speak truly or falsely when they so said?

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God." Did he deceive the Thessalonians, or was he self-de-

ceived in so saying? Yet another will say: "I do not accept any mechanical theory of inspiration, but I believe in a dynamical doctrine. I believe the ideas of the Bible, not the words are inspired." What sort of revelation would be an unuttered and wordless communication from heaven? And what did Paul mean when, in referring to the revelation made through him, he said: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." And why did he exhort Timothy to hold fast the form of sound words?"

Why was the phrase "the word of God" ever applied to the Scriptures? Why did the apostle say to his beloved son in the gospel, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine?" It is well not to try to analyze the processes of divine inspiration, even as it is not wise to endeavor to accomplish the impossible task of scrutinizing the incarnation by which the Godman—very God and very man—is revealed unto us. It is enough to know that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Certainly, a Bibleless man in the pulpit is utterly helpless and powerless. He cannot speak with authority, for he has repudiated the only source of authority he ever had. An equivocal or ambiguous revelation furnishes no basis for any spiritual authority within or without the pulpit. But "we have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto we do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day star arise in our hearts; knowing this, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."—Pentecostal Herald.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever."

"The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."

God is quick, and powerful, and is not as any two-edged sword, which divideth asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

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