

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

glory to glory. What was the glory of yesterday? What is the glory of to-day? What does he hope it will be of to-morrow? Does he, indeed, find his faults falling from him, his temptations abating, his graces and gifts unconsciously lighting up his home and the circle of his friends? These are the questions that must be asked by the servant of Christ when he compares his practice with his principles, and examines his conduct in the light of his ideal. Self-satisfied he will never be; but of this he will be growingly ambitious, that from his heart may ever be more thoroughly divested every failing and inconsistency, everything selfish, mean, base, dishonourable, discreditable, everything that could make him ashamed of himself; and that on him may fall the zealous earnest prayers of St. Paul himself, when in his eager self-devotion he longed that all the servants of Christ should be more and more conformed to His image. Then, indeed, he will have cause to respect God within him, the hope of glory.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.



ART. III.—THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN
THE NEW.

(Concluded from page 199.)

NOT more probable than the supposition that our Lord's reference to Scripture is to be interpreted as a usage merely conventional, is the supposition that we may regard His reference to it as the result of ignorance and His professed subjection to the requirements of prophecy as a case in which His knowledge as the Son of God was limited by His assumption of man's nature; but then in this case it becomes very difficult to draw the line between the instances in which we can rely upon His declarations, and those others which are open to the correction of our wider knowledge, our larger experience, the discoveries of criticism, and the like. Why are we to believe Him in His assertion about Himself—"Before Abraham was, I am" (John viii. 58, and the like)—and His professed revelations of the Kingdom of God, if we are to suppose that He did not know whether the stories of Noah, and Lot, and Abraham were or were not on a level with those of the "Arabian Nights"? Or, to put it otherwise, suppose that we have discovered that they are on a level with them, and are alike mythical; will it not follow as a matter of course that we shall think the less of His knowledge and judgment in other matters? Having found out that He knew less than we know in matters of this kind, can

we place any more reliance on His words when He tells us about a world of which He professed to know everything and we know nothing? I very much fear that if we have reason to believe that Christ was wrong on any points within our own sphere of knowledge we shall have the less reason to trust Him when He professes to go beyond it. In fact, we should only be acting, if we did so, after the analogy of His own teaching: "He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much;"—He that is incorrect in one point may be wrong also in another. "If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" If I have been indifferent to truth in My teaching here how can I expect you to believe Me elsewhere? "If I have told you earthly things and ye [have cause to] believe Me not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" If He has misled or deceived us in a matter of so much importance as this, how can we be expected to commit ourselves to Him and to trust Him in matters of supreme and eternal import? Would not this be to lay upon us a burden which we are not able to bear, to expose our faith to a test which it would be unreasonable to expect it to stand? For this is not a question as to whether in His man's nature we are to attribute universal knowledge to Christ, which would simply be to make Him a monstrosity, but whether we are to accept Him as an authorized and accredited teacher in such a matter as the character and function of those Scriptures upon the testimony of which, to a very large extent, He based His own mission, and His claim to have come from God. Was He warranted in appealing to the authority of Moses if it can be shown that the law to which He appealed had nothing whatever to do with Moses; that it lacked the Divine authority which it claimed to have as coming from him, and which there is no evidence of its having had if it did not so come? For it is not a matter to be questioned whether laws prescribed by the priests many centuries after the time of Moses could rightly claim to be Divine merely because they were promulgated with the conventional but wholly inaccurate and unwarrantable formula, "The Lord said unto Moses." And if not Divine He was certainly wrong, and not only wrong in fact, but wrong morally, if He attributed to compositions or to laws thus introduced, a Divine authority which it was impossible they could possess, and which, if they did not possess it, He could not bestow. For instance, when our Lord said to the leper, "Show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony¹ unto them," He quoted laws² which we are now told were as

¹ Matt. viii. 4.

² Lev. xiv. 3, 4, 10.

late as, if not later, than the time of Ezra. Now, if the critics are right, is it possible to think that our Lord was not seriously compromised in referring to them in this way? For according to the critics, it is certain that this was not a command given by Moses, but our Lord acknowledged it not only as coming from him, but also for his sake. He either knew or did not know that it was the commandment of Moses. If He did not *know* it was the commandment of Moses, that is, was uncertain whether it was or not, have we any reason to believe He would have spoken of it as He did? Nay, have we not every reason to believe He would not so have spoken of it? On the other hand, if He knew it was *not* the commandment of Moses, can He have had any motive for calling it his commandment? And once more, if He thought it was the commandment of Moses, and it turns out not to be, what are we to think of Him for speaking of it as He did? Is it not evident that He stands convicted of placing the law of Moses (and that, be it observed, not the moral but the ceremonial law), on an elevation to which it was not entitled? and what are we to think of Him if this was the case? What are we to think of Him when He says, "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise fall from the law till all be fulfilled" (Matt. v. 18). What are we to think of Him when He says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. vii. 7). What are we to think of Him when He says, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father, and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. xi. 27). Lastly, what are we to think of Him when He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). Have we any more reason to trust Him in these cases than in the others? and if so, on what principle is our selection to be made? I am quite aware that the dilemma is an unpopular, and, as some regard it, an unwarrantable device to resort to in argument; but there are times when we must take our choice between two alternatives, and an intermediate position is not open to us. And it seems to me that this is one of them: and then in such a case to refuse to take our choice is to remain neutral and undecided, which is at all events incompatible with action. If, on the other hand, we are to accept some of the words of Christ and to reject others, how are we to know which to accept and which to reject? and is any such course consistent with the absolute surrender which our Lord demands, and with His own testimony? "I have not spoken of Myself; but the

Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John xii. 49). "The words which I speak unto you I speak not of Myself" (xiv. 10); "The word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me" (xiv. 24); "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me" (xvii. 8); "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 35; Mark xiii. 31; Luke xxi. 23). How is this compatible with our choosing some and rejecting others? or with the possible discovery of criticism after eighteen centuries that there was a flaw in the foundation on which He built, and that He had made a radical error in ascribing to Moses what belonged to Ezra, and treated an ideal fabrication of the time of Josiah as the very words of the Most High revealed to Moses? It remains, therefore, that the only course open to us with regard to the words of Christ, and His application of Scripture, is to "trust Him not at all, or all in all."

There is something that is due to His utterances simply on the ground of their being His. As it is said of the works of Bishop Pearson that the very dust of his writings is gold, so with far more truth may we regard even the subordinate statements of Christ, who spake as never man spake, as not lightly to be set aside, but may even claim to throw their weight into the scale when we are challenged to decide on such a matter as the authority and date of the received books of Moses. For this is not merely a literary question, affording an open field for discussion; because it is undeniable that Christ has claimed an authority for the received writings of Moses which they cannot have if they are not his, and therefore the position of their authority stands or falls with the position of their date and the genuineness of their origin.

Now, we have reason to be thankful that the recent forms in which the extremest Pentateuchal and Old Testament criticism has been presented to the English public by Driver and Cheyne, as *e.g.*, in the "Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament," and the Bampton Lectures for 1889, are such as cannot fail to raise the indignant protest of English common-sense. We should hardly be wrong in saying that it would be more easy to believe that the books of the Old Testament came down straight from heaven than that the condition and circumstances of their production were such as we are asked to believe they were. If adequate reasons were advanced, such as appeal to experience and to common-sense, it would be, of course, our duty to regard them; but when the reasons given are inadequate, deficient, and trivial, it is obviously no less our duty to reject them. The only verdict we can give is that of *not proven*.

It appears to be certain, therefore, that we cannot regard our Lord's use of Scripture as a mere concession to the conventional estimate of it, and certainly not, if we are to place any faith in what He tells us of Himself and His words, as though they were to be referred to His ignorance or indifference as to its true character; for we must admit that His teaching with regard to Scripture has an equal claim upon our attention with anything else that He has taught us. But if this be so, what are the reasonable inferences we may draw therefrom? First, that the Old Testament Scriptures are not to be regarded as a haphazard collection of the works of unknown and unauthorized writers who uttered accidentally certain things of real intrinsic value in themselves, as is the case with many of our own writers and with those of other nations. In this respect the Hebrew writers had no monopoly of wisdom, however high the place they hold in the republic of letters. It was manifestly for a higher reason than this that our Lord appealed to them. He regarded the Old Testament writings as in a special sense the heritage of the fathers which they had received of God. He recognised the history as authentic; He considered the Law as divinely given and authorized, both in its moral and ceremonial branches; and He regarded the Psalms and the Prophets as specially endowed with the Spirit of God—the Spirit that without measure was poured out on Him; and He regarded it as peculiarly His own mission that the prophecies, in their lofty privileges and in their solemn and tremendous responsibilities, should be fulfilled in Him.

And from this there follow two inferences. First, that the lax way of reading the Old Testament which rejects half its history and refers its highest flights of prophecy to an acute and penetrating insight into the principles, causes, and results of current events is incompatible with, and discouraged by, the example and practice of our Lord in His deference to and His application of its prophecy and history. Making all possible allowance for any modifying considerations we can discover in His use of the Old Testament, there remains clear and distinct in His use of it the recognition of a pervading and informing Spirit, which, if such recognition is trustworthy, as we have seen it must be, at once puts the Old Testament on a level above all the other literature of the world, save only that which was the direct result of His own life and teaching; and this, as I have said, not on account merely of its intrinsic excellence, but because He recognised it as the means and channel of a Divine message to man conveyed through His own nation by its prophets and seers.

But again, while we acknowledge this to the fullest extent,

we do not consider it incumbent upon us to establish every date, to vindicate every assertion, to overlook and blink every inconsistency, discrepancy, or contradiction which a keen-witted criticism can detect in the Old Testament. No one can read the Old Testament with any care without encountering obstacles and difficulties which cannot fail to baffle the utmost ingenuity and skill, just as we meet with the like difficulties in the Gospel history. The question is, are we to allow this fact to discredit the whole literature, and to outweigh our Lord's plain acknowledgment of and deference to it? or are we to set against these things the general estimate of its worth which He has taught us to form, and to admit the truth, beauty, and majesty of the Divine elements therein, while we are ready to acknowledge that the revelation, being given to man and by man, can hardly be expected to be devoid of certain human elements also? If the eternal Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, why should not the spoken Word likewise partake of that human nature which He wore, and to the conditions of which He made Himself subject? We are not called upon, even if we were able, to decide or to define the precise limits of the human and the Divine in the nature of Christ, any more than we are to distinguish and determine the principles which govern the union of the Divine and human in Scripture; it is enough for us in either case not to merge the one in the other, and not, in our eagerness to detect the human, to fail to acknowledge and to worship the Divine.

Secondly, the authority which Christ recognised in Scripture was manifestly an authority independent of man. Had Deuteronomy, for example, been written under the monarchy, it could have had only the intrinsic authority of its inherent beauty and truth derived from the anonymous writer of it. On the hypothesis there was not in it the authority of specific revelation because, as its writer was unknown, so his claim on our attention was unauthorized, as it is manifestly unauthenticated. His work was no more than any similar work of Seneca, Epictetus, or Cicero—having, indeed, certain qualities of its own of high excellence, but possessing no credentials of a heavenly character that we are bound to recognise. But Christ claimed for it the authority of the Word of God, the Scriptures of truth. "It is written;" "Moses, because of the hardness of your heart, wrote you this precept."¹ Now, the authority of Moses was a known and recognised authority. He had wrought mighty works, to which he appealed in proof of his mission. With him, as we are three times told (Exod. xxxiii. 11; Numb. xii. 8; Deut. xxxiv. 10), the Lord spake

¹ Matt. xix. 8; Mark x. 5.

face to face. He was the accredited messenger of God. Unless, therefore, his mission was a lie, that which he spoke in the name of God had a direct claim on our attention. It was the message of God and the word of God, and to it as such Christ appealed. Had anyone else personated Moses and assumed his functions, he would have had to accredit his mission as the mission of Moses was accredited; and as long as it lacked this accrediting it would have had no claim on our acceptance as the message of God, however lofty and sublime in itself. Thus the element which differentiates the Word of God, as that which differentiates the mission of Christ, is its supernatural element. Divest the Gospels and the Gospel histories of the supernatural, and you degrade them to the level of Herodotus or Livy. You have, and can have, no incarnation and no resurrection, and no mighty works revealing the character of God; you have only the monstrosity of an attractive character—whose character, however, no less than his mission, was vitiated by a falsehood; for if the foundation was false, the superstructure also was unsound.

It is the same with the Old Testament. If you do away with its supernatural credentials, and force it to rest only on its natural characteristics and excellencies, you reduce it, indeed, to the level of mundane literature, but in so doing you destroy and neutralize its claims on our special attention, and you altogether disqualify it for the purpose for which Christ appealed to it.

It is this which is the real secret of the modern theology. It professes to rest on criticism, but its criticism is uncritical and indiscriminating. It applies the microscope to minute features of the text, and exaggerates its imaginary discoveries to a portentous magnitude; but it overlooks other features which he who runs may read, and which, when read in their simplicity, are sufficient to expose the absurdity of the conjectural discoveries. It presupposes original records which must have existed and perished, and invents writers whom it knows only as P. and D. and J. and E., and conceives these literary impersonalities to have pieced together the surviving fragments of those records without regard to consistency, but nevertheless with such consummate skill that they have escaped detection as independent writers for more than two thousand years; while the last author of all, to whom we are indebted for the books as we have them, is not only unknown even to an oblivious and ungrateful fame, but has not been thought worthy of so much as a literary symbol, though it is clear that to him, as the ultimate reconciler of priest and prophet, the combiner of the work of Elohist and Jehovist, of Deuteronomist and Redactor, into an apparently harmonious or contrariant

whole, as the case may be, the world, whether Christian or non-Christian, believing or unbelieving, has been laid under obligations of ceaseless and insolvent gratitude. Verily, there are no persons so credulous as the unbelieving; there is nothing so probable and so credible as the unexpected and the impossible; there is nothing more abhorrent to nature than the supernatural. But, given these two factors, God and revelation, and it is hard to see how we can dispense with the supernatural. Certain it is that we must strike the balance between probabilities; and the question in this case is whether, if God has given an actual revelation, He is more likely to have given it through deception and fraud than by miracle and prophecy; whether, if He sent His Son, Christ, to be born of a virgin, to die the death of a malefactor, and to rise again from the dead, that Son, Christ Jesus, is more likely to have misunderstood and misapplied the Scriptures, to which He appealed as furnishing part of the credentials of His mission, than He is to have placed them on their true and legitimate basis as the Word of the Father from whom He came, and the work of the Spirit whom He promised to send; and whether, if this is really the purpose for which He claimed them, it is in any sense probable that their actual origin and growth is after the manner and with the result that has been proposed, which is inconsistent with prophecy and rejects miracle; and whether, after all, if there is any actual utterance of God to man, any voice of the Father speaking to the heart of His children, it is not more probable that He prepared them for the full-toned utterance of that voice, in sundry times and in divers manners, by marvellous history, by stupendous miracle, by dark and unintelligible prophecy, till He spake by man's voice in the substance of human flesh, not without mighty works and potent prophecies, than that He left men to discover as best they could the traces of His will through records and writings partly defective, partly distorted, and more than half untrue, and which, if they had any reference to His Son, only had it by accident, of which He falsely and ignorantly availed Himself.

STANLEY LEATHES.

ART. IV.—THE “INDEMONSTRABLE PRINCIPLE” OF
CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS.

THE contest between the philosophy of faith and that of unbelief—between those who accept a Divine revelation upon reasonable and sufficient evidence and those who reject every truth which is incapable of actual demonstration,