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THE TESTIMONY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

IT occurs to the present writer that there is need of greater courage, on the part of those who value the old truths, to face those who daringly deny the inspiration and infallibility of the Old Testament. We need to confront them with the New Testament in our hands and demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that if we are to believe the testimony of our Lord and His Apostles, then the position of these critics is wholly untenable.

It is proposed now to endeavour to show from the Epistle to the Romans that the great Apostle Paul believed "all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts xxiv. 14).

I

First, the Epistle teaches us that the *Old Testament Scriptures* are "holy" (i. 2).

The Apostle describes them as "the holy Scriptures". That is, they are writings worthy of the highest regard and reverence. They are set apart from all other writings. We should never dream of speaking of the writings of Milton, Shakespeare or Macaulay as "holy". The Scriptures are holy "because they treated of holy things and because they were given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost" (Dr. C. Hodge). They "came from God and contain His words" (Grimm). But an objector is entitled to ask for proof that "the holy Scriptures" mean the books of the Old Testament. This Epistle furnishes the proof. The Apostle asks, "What saith the Scripture?" and he quotes Genesis xv. 6 (see Rom. iv. 3).

The Book of Genesis, then, is a part of Holy Scripture.

Again the Apostle says, "The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh" (ch. ix. 17), and he quotes Exodus ix. 16.

The Book of Exodus therefore is Scripture.

The Apostle says, "The Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (ch. x. 11). This is a quotation from Isaiah xxviii. 16. *Isaiah's prophecy* is therefore Scripture.

The Apostle says, "Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias?" (ch. xi. 2-4). Then he quotes 1 Kings xix. 10, 14, 18. *The Book of Kings*, therefore, is Scripture.

In chapter xv. 3, 4 the Apostle quotes Psalm lxix. 9, and speaks of it as a part of the Scriptures written for our learning. Thus Genesis, Exodus, Kings, Psalms and Isaiah are all spoken of as Scripture. Who can doubt that by "the holy Scriptures" the Apostle meant that collection of sacred books which we call the Old Testament Scriptures? It is noteworthy that the quotation from Isaiah xxviii. 16, which is prefaced by "the Scripture saith" in Rom. x. 11, is prefaced by the words "*As it is written*" in Rom. ix. 33. These words "As it is written" or "it is written" occur sixteen times in the Epistle to the Romans and three additional books of the Old Testament (Habakkuk, Malachi, and Deuteronomy) are quoted as forming a part of the Old Testament Scriptures. Thus there can be no manner of doubt that the Apostle quoted without discrimination any of the books of the Old Testament and regarded them all as "the holy Scriptures". The title "holy" in itself suggests their inspiration.

II

Secondly, the Apostle in this Epistle teaches us that *the Old Testament is prophetic*. It is a collection of books which are prophetic in their character. He speaks of them as "the Scriptures of the prophets" or the prophetic Scriptures (chap. xvi. 26).

The Apostle says he was "separated unto the Gospel of God, which He promised afore *by His prophets* in the holy Scriptures" (chap. i. 1, 2).

All the Scriptures are prophetic and the men who wrote them were God's prophets. They were raised up and sent by Him. They were "holy men of God" as Peter tells us who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost".

A prophet is one who infallibly speaks the word of God. His message may be doctrinal, preceptive, predictive or historical. In every case it is plenary inspired.

The Gospel of God was promised beforehand by means of the prophetic Scriptures. Christ is the embodiment of the Gospel, and hundreds of years before His coming, His birth,

His rejection, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His session at the right hand of God were predicted. The psalms, and the prophets Isaiah and Micah foretold these things. They must therefore be inspired of God. Our Lord Himself said "that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me" (Luke xxiv. 44).

The whole of the Old Testament spoke of Him. The whole was prophetic. The Old Testament is full of Gospel truth, and it is full of Christ Whose birth was announced by the angel as "good tidings". Moses was a prophet, and David was a prophet, as well as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others to whom the title "prophet" is usually given.

III

Thirdly, the Apostle teaches us that *the Old Testament Scriptures are oracular*.

The Apostle asks, "What advantage then hath the Jew?" And he answers, "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 1, 2).

This expression, "the oracles of God", seems clearly to refer to the whole of the Old Testament. Stephen uses the word "oracles" to denote those Divine communications which Moses the prophet received on Mount Sinai from God (Acts vii. 38). An oracle amongst the heathen was the utterance of the gods. It was regarded as a Divine announcement. In the New Testament it denotes the utterance of the true God, and therefore it is infallible. It is the Word of God. To the Jews "were committed the oracles of God". God, in time past, spake unto the Jewish nation by the prophets, i.e. by the prophetic Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures seem plainly to be what the Apostle meant when he spoke of "the oracles of God". Dr. Charles Hodge says that Calvin and others understood the expression of the whole Scriptures, and Dr. Hodge adds, "In favour of this last (view) is the usage of the phrase which stands in the Old Testament for the revelation of God in general, and in the New Testament for any Divine communication (Heb. v. 12; 1 Peter iv. 11). The words therefore are general in their meaning, and there is nothing in the context to limit them; for

the Apostle is speaking of the treasure committed to the safe custody of the Jews ; that deposit of Divine knowledge by which they were distinguished from all other nations. Here as in innumerable other places, the sacred writers of the New Testament use forms of expression which clearly imply that they regarded the sacred writings of the Jews as really the Word of God ” (*Commentary on Romans*).

Fausset says of the word “ oracles ” : “ In the New Testament the Spirit-inspired Scriptures (Rom. iii. 2 ; Heb. v. 12 ; 1 Peter iv. 11) of the Old Testament are so called ” (*Critical and Expository Bible Cyclopaedia*).

Dr. David Brown says, “ This remarkable expression (‘ the oracles of God ’) . . . denoting ‘ Divine communications ’ in general, is transferred to the Sacred Scriptures, to express their oracular, Divinely authoritative character.”

In this connection it is remarkable that in the Coronation Service the Bible is presented to the King by the Archbishop of Canterbury who addresses him with these words : “ Our Gracious King ; we present you with this book the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom ; this is the royal Law ; these are the lively Oracles of God ” (*The Church Gazette* for June 1935, p. 63). Evidently in the view of those who drew up the Coronation Service the Bible, the whole Bible, was the Word of God.

This description of the Old Testament in the Epistle to the Romans is a further proof that the Apostle regarded these ancient writings as “ God’s Word written ”. Hence he could rightly say of these Scriptures, “ Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.”

IV

Fourthly, the Apostle teaches us that *the Old Testament is historical and fully reliable as an historical record*. To say with the more radical school of critics that “ the Old Testament is in the main *unhistorical* ” is to go flatly contrary to the teaching of Christ and that of all His Apostles, and in particular it is flatly contrary to the teaching of the Apostle Paul in his great Epistle to the Romans.

Professor Gaussen says, “ We have to know whether what is thus inspired by God in the Scriptures, be a part of the Scriptures,

or the whole of the Scriptures. We say that it is the whole Scriptures ;—*the historical books* as well as the prophecies. . . . In other words, it has been our object to establish by the Word of God that the Scripture is from God, that the Scripture is throughout from God, and that the Scripture throughout is entirely from God ” (*Theopneustia*, Chap. I, Section III).

The Apostle Paul believed *all things* which were written “ in the law and in the prophets ” (Acts xxiv. 14). He had not the faintest doubt that all the persons mentioned in the Old Testament were real human beings. Hence no less than fourteen different Old Testament persons are mentioned by the Apostle in this Epistle. These are Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Benjamin, Sarah, Rebecca, Moses, Pharaoh, David, Elijah, Isaiah and Hosea. In addition, he mentions the false god Baal who was worshipped by Israel in the time of Ahab.

Then the Apostle refers to a large number of the events which are recorded in the Old Testament, and he refers to them as true history. He refers to the Fall, and to the consequent prevalence of death from Adam to Moses, thus at one sweep expressing his belief in the records of death recorded in the five books of Moses (Rom. v. 12, 14). These included the death of the patriarchs ; the wholesale deaths at the Flood, and at the destruction of the cities of the plain ; the deaths of the firstborn in Egypt and of Pharaoh’s host in the Red Sea ; and the deaths which took place in the wilderness during the forty years wandering. He refers to the promise of a numerous seed to Abraham (Rom. iv. 18 ; Gen. xv. 5) ; to the institution of Circumcision (Rom. iv. 11 ; Gen. xvii. 10, 11) ; to the promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations (Rom. iv. 17 ; Gen. xvii. 4-6) ; and to the age of Abraham and Sarah (Rom. iv. 19 ; Gen. xvii. 17).

The Apostle refers to Divine conversations with Abraham, with Rebekah, with Moses and with Elijah (Rom. ix. 9 ; ix. 7 ; ix. 12 ; ix. 15 ; xi. 3, 4. Compare Gen. xviii. 10 ; xxi. 12 ; xxv. 23 ; Exod. xxxiii. 19 ; 1 Kings xviii. 4 ; xix. 10, 14, 18). It is evident that he believed the record of the killing of the prophets by Jezebel and his quotation of Isaiah i. 9 in Rom. ix. 29 suggests his belief in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah.

Bishop Moule points out that “ there are at least sixty-one direct quotations in this Epistle from the Old Testament ”, and he says, “ The allusions to Old Testament history, type and

doctrine extend, of course, far beyond even these verbal references." These quotations are taken from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi. Many of these books are quoted many times over. (See Cambridge Bible for Schools, *Romans*, p. 31.) In every instance the Apostle quotes the Old Testament Scriptures as historically accurate and as the inspired Word of God.

V

Fifthly, *the Apostle teaches us in this Epistle the doctrinal character of the Old Testament.*

In his second Epistle to Timothy he declares that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is *profitable for doctrine.*" The Epistle to the Romans shows how fully he believed this twofold declaration.

All the Apostle's Gospel teaching was based on the Old Testament Scriptures. (See Acts xvii. 2, 3; xxviii. 23.) This Epistle shows that practically all the great foundation truths of the Gospel were taught by the Apostle from the Old Testament. The following great doctrines may be enumerated:—

(1) The Fall, and its penalty. (Rom. v. 12; Gen. ii. 17; iii. 6, 19.)

(2) The doctrine of sin. (Rom. iii. 10-19. Based on quotations from six Psalms and from Isaiah lix. 7, 8.)

(3) The doctrine of Justification. (Rom. i. 17; iv. 1-8; x. 5-8. Compared with Hab. ii. 4; Gen. xv. 6; Psalms xxxii. 1, 2.)

(4) The doctrine of Election. Isaac preferred to Ishmael (Rom. ix. 7). Jacob preferred to Esau (Rom. ix. 10-13). Reservation of the seven thousand (Rom. xi. 4, 5).

(5) The doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. (Rom. ix. 15, 17, 20.)

(6) The doctrine of Effectual Calling. (Rom. ix. 24-9; x. 19-21.)

(7) The doctrine of a Divine welcome to every seeking sinner. (Rom. ix. 33; x. 11, 13.)

(8) The doctrine of suffering for Christ's sake. (Rom. viii. 35, 36; Psalms xlv. 22.)

(9) The doctrine of the blindness of Israel and their ultimate salvation. (Rom. x. 21 ; xi. 8, 9, 25, 26.)

(10) The doctrine of future judgment. (Rom. xiv. 10-12 ; xvi. 20.)

VI

Lastly, *the Epistle teaches us preceptive and practical truth from the Old Testament.*

In other words, the Apostle teaches us that the Old Testament, even if we did not possess the New Testament, furnishes us with our rule of faith and practice.

The teaching of the Apostle Paul gives no countenance to present-day disparagement of the Old Testament. To him the Old Testament is full of Gospel truth and of that preceptive teaching, the practice of which proves that we have passed from death unto life.

The Apostle John says, " We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren " (1 John iii. 14). The Apostle Paul enjoins love to the brethren as a Christian duty, and he bases this teaching on the Old Testament. Having quoted the moral law as our rule of life he says, " And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour : therefore love is the fulfilling of the law " (Romans xiii. 8-10). Exodus xx. 13-17 and Leviticus xix. 18 are quoted by him to indicate to Christians how they ought to walk and to please God.

But Christians are also to love their enemies, and to refrain from avenging themselves upon those who treat them unkindly. In proof of that the Apostle again cites the Old Testament. " Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath : for it is written, Vengeance is Mine ; I will repay saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

The Apostle quotes from Deuteronomy xxxii. 35 and from Proverbs xxv. 21, 22 in order to inculcate love to their enemies on the Christians living in Rome. Thus this one Epistle alone furnishes abundant proof that in the view of the great Apostle to the Gentiles all the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi was the inspired Word of the living God.

Open it where we will, we hear God speaking to us through those holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

“The Apostles preached Jesus, not from their own writings, which did not exist then, but from the Scriptures. What was Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost? He announced (1) the outpouring of the Spirit according to Joel ii; (2) the resurrection of Jesus according to Psalm xvi; (3) His ascension according to Psalm cx; and on this he bases (4) the Lordship of Jesus as the Messiah.”

“All the Apostles preached Jesus from Moses and the prophets. The Book of Acts is a continuous unfolding of the ancient Scripture.”

“It is not too much to say, that as a dictionary is necessary to explain the words of a new language, so the words and facts of the Gospels and Epistles require the explanation of Moses and the prophets. You cannot read the ‘New Testament’ without using the ‘Old’ as a dictionary” (*Christ and the Scriptures*, by Dr. Adolph Saphir, pp. 32, 33, 37, 38).

“May we not say”, says Principal A. McCaig, late of Pastors’ College, London, “that it is absolutely clear that the Apostles are entirely at variance with the critics as to the historical value of the Old Testament? The critics themselves admit this, but their hypothesis that the Apostles ‘did not know any better’ cannot be accepted by those who believe in the full inspiration of the Apostles. We accept the word of an Apostle before the word of an Oxford or a German critic any day. . . . If the Spirit of God led them into all the truth, He could not leave them in ignorance of such grave matters as the critics profess to have discovered. He could not allow them to build up momentous and vital arguments upon false and misleading premises” (*The Grand Old Book*, p. 121).

The words which our Lord put into the mouth of Abraham may be said of all who reject the plenary inspiration of the Old Testament: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke xvi. 31).

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