

Origen, the Father of Bible Interpretation

by J.B. Galloway

Origen, a Christian thinker and scholar, made significant contributions to Christian theology through his encyclopedic labors on the Scriptures and his writings on systematic theology.

Scripture: Matthew 5:8, John 14:26, Acts 1:8, 1 Peter 1:15, 1 John 3:9

Topics: "Bible Interpretation", "Christian Theology"

Description

J.B. Galloway preaches about the life and works of Origen, a prominent early Church scholar, known for his extensive writings and interpretations of the Scriptures. Origen's dedication to studying the Bible from a young age, his perseverance through trials and persecutions, and his profound insights into the deeper meanings of Scripture serve as an inspiration for believers. His emphasis on holiness, the unction of Christ, living above sin, and the importance of purity of heart to see God are key teachings that Origen imparted through his works and commentaries. Origen's legacy as a theologian and interpreter of the Bible continues to impact Christian thought and understanding of the Scriptures.

Transcript

The greatest Bible scholar of the Early Church was Origen, surnamed Adamantius, born at Alexandria, about the year A.D. 185. He was one of the greatest of all Christian thinkers. The Church is forever indebted to him for his encyclopedic labors on the Scriptures in producing the Hexapla. He was born in a Christian home. His father was a teacher of rhetoric and grammar and a man of decided piety. Under his superintendence, the youthful Origen was educated in all the Grecian knowledge and also required daily to memorize a portion of scripture. The spirit of inquiry into the meaning of the Scriptures showed itself early. He was never satisfied with the plain meaning of them, but sought to penetrate into the deeper meaning of them. His father Leonidas rebuked him for his curiosity, but rejoiced to himself at the signs of genius that he saw in his son, and thanked God for being permitted to be the father of such a child. He would imprint kisses on the breast of the child while he was sleeping and say, "The temple of the Holy Ghost."

When Origen was seventeen years old, his father was martyred in the persecution of Septimius Severus. He wrote to his father while he was in prison, exhorting him to constancy under trials. He wished to share the same fate as his father, but was prevented from leaving home by his mother's hiding his clothes. At the death of his father their property was confiscated, and he was left with his mother and six younger brothers to support. A wealthy lady opened her home to him a short time; but, finding his position here

uncomfortable, he resolved to enter the career of a teacher to support himself.

His careful instruction by his father in the Grecian literature, and his own diligence and ability, speedily attracted attention and brought him many pupils; some of these sought to be instructed in the principles of the Christian religion. Bishop Demetrius appointed him as a master in the Catechetical School. A youth not yet past eighteen years took the place of Clement, who had retired because of persecution. He refused remuneration, and lived upon a scanty pittance, laboring in the school by day and studying the Scriptures the greater part of the night.

On a visit to Caesarea he was allowed by the bishop to expound the Scriptures in church, while yet a layman. This aroused the jealousy of the Bishop of Alexandria, who ordered him to return. A short time afterward he was forbidden to teach at Alexandria and excommunicated. He went to Caesarea and was honorably received, admitted to the priesthood, and allowed to work for more than twenty years.

Ambrose, a man of large means, had a great admiration for Origen and was delighted to bear the expense of having his works transcribed and published. He furnished him with "more than seven amanuenses and an equal number of transcribers." The literary labors of these years were prodigious. In the persecution under Decius he was put in prison and tortured. He was released at the death of Decius but, broken in health by his suffering, he died in A.D. 253.

He was a very voluminous author. Jerome says that he wrote more than any man could read. It is related that he wrote six thousand volumes. In exegetical works, he wrote on practically the whole Bible. His main title for fame rests upon the First Principles, a work on systematic theology; this was written while he was young. He is said to have worked twenty-eight years upon the Hexapla or six-columned Bible. Six different versions of the Bible were written in parallel columns and made nearly fifty volumes. His Against Celsus is a noble defense of Christianity written in answer to one of the greatest skeptical philosophers of his time. He also wrote many practical works on many subjects.

Origen On Holiness

In about A.D. 210 he refers to the custom then practiced of praying for the newly baptized to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Unction of Christ

In the Seventy Homily of Ezekiel he says:

The unction of Christ, of holy doctrine, is the oil by which the holy man is anointed, having been instructed in the Scriptures, and taught how to be baptized; then changing a few things he [the minister] says to him, You are no longer a catechumen, now you are regenerated; such a man receives the unction of God.

Live Above Sin

He believes that we can live above sin. From First Principles, Book III, chapter 1, we read:

Since in the preaching of the church there is included the doctrine respecting a just judgment of God, which, when believed to be true, incites those who hear it to live virtuously, and to shun sin by all means, inasmuch as they manifestly acknowledge that things of praise and blame are within our power.

Two Works

In Book IV, chapter 1, we read:

As now by participating in the Son of God one is adopted as a son, and by participating in that wisdom which is in God is rendered wise, so also by participation in the Holy Spirit is a man rendered holy and spiritual.

Here two distinct and separate acts are mentioned, adoption as sons and rendered holy by the Holy Spirit-what Wesley called a "second blessing, properly so-called."

Sin No More

He mentioned the twofold mission of Jesus to save the sinner and to keep the saint above sin in his *Against Celsus*, Book III, chapter 62:

God the Word was sent, indeed, as a physician to sinners, but as a teacher of divine mysteries to those who are already pure and who sin no more. But Celsus, unable to see this distinction -- for he had not desire to be animated with a love of truth -- remarks, "Why was he not sent to those who were without sin? What evil is not to have committed sin?" To which we reply, that if by those "who were without sin" he means those who sin no more, then our Saviour was sent to such, but not as a physician. While if by those "who were without sin" he means such as have never at any time sinned -- for he made no distinction in his statement -- we reply that it is impossible for a man thus to be without sin; for all have sinned at some time.

Pure in Heart See God

Again in answering Celsus he says (*Book VII, chapter 45*):

But let us see further what the things are which he proposes to teach us, if we can comprehend them, since he [Celsus] speaks of us as being utterly wedded to the flesh; although if we live well, and in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, we hear this said of us: "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." He says also that we look upon nothing that is pure, although our endeavor is to keep even our thoughts free from all defilement of sin, and although in prayer we say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," so that we may hold Him with that pure heart to which alone is granted to See Him.

Only the pure in heart can see God. As a modern writer says, "Holiness or hell."

The Commentaries Of Origen

Although Origen is the first interpreter of the Scriptures, he speaks of those who had preceded him. Many of his comments are just and shrewd; but the tenets of the Alexandria school, where he was, led him to many extravagances. Only fragments of most of his commentaries remain. He held that divine things were wrapped up in mysteries, and that everything in Scripture has mystical meaning in addition to that which is obvious. He was the first great teacher who deliberately set himself to the task of explaining the Scriptures, and for fifty years he continued this work and treated almost the whole Bible. His commentaries on John are the first work of Christian exegesis which has come down to us. As it has reached us, there are thirty-two volumes, and the first five of these were written before A.D. 231.

Holiness In Origen'S Commentary On John

Canaan Land

In Books 25 and 26 he shows that the crossing of the Jordan by Joshua and the Children of Israel is symbolical of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Drawing from the meaning of the word Jordan, meaning going down, consecration is pictured and the entering of Canaan points to the land of rest that awaits all who make their consecration complete.

From Book 25:

Let us look at the words of the Gospel now before us. "Jordan" means "their going down" What river will "their going down" be, to which one must come to be purified, a river going down, not with its own descent, but "theirs," namely, of men, who but our Saviour who separates those who received their lots from Moses from those who obtain their portion through Jesus (Joshua)? His current, flowing in the descending stream, making glad, as we find in the Psalms, the city of God, not the visible Jerusalem -- for it has no rivers beside it -- but the blameless Church of God, built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ our Lord being the chief corner-stone. Under the Jordan, accordingly, we have to understand the Word of God who became flesh and tabernacled among us, Jesus who gives us as our inheritance the humanity which He assumed, for that is the head corner-stone, which being taken up into the deity of the Son of God, is washed by being so assumed, and then receives into itself the pure and guileless dove of the Spirit, bound to it and no longer able to fly away from it. For "Upon whomsoever," we read, "thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit." Hence, he who receives the Spirit abiding on Jesus himself is able to baptize those who come to him in that abiding Spirit.

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