

Grounds on Which We Receive the Bible

by J.W. McGarvey

The sermon discusses the various grounds on which individuals receive the Bible as the word of God, including faith based on education and upbringing, the character of the teachers, the effects of believing in the Bible, the stamp of truthfulness, the character of Jesus, and the adaptation of the Bible to the spiritual wants of our fallen race.

Scripture: Matthew 19:4, Mark 12:35, Luke 24:25, John 5:45, Acts 2:24, Acts 3:22, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Biblical Inspiration", "Divine Authority"

Description

J.W. McGarvey preaches about the definitions of receiving the Bible as the word of God and the only rule of faith and practice. He distinguishes between the word of God and the words of God, emphasizing the divine inspiration behind the Bible's contents. McGarvey discusses the narrowest ground of belief, where many believers accept the Bible based on traditional upbringing, and broader grounds of belief, including the credibility of the Bible's historical and prophetic accounts. He delves into the inspiration of the Bible writers, highlighting the fulfillment of prophecies and the endorsement of the Old Testament by Jesus and the Apostles as evidence of divine inspiration.

Transcript

DEFINITIONS.

In order to free the terms in which our theme is expressed from all apparent ambiguity, and to make perfectly clear its meaning, we commence with a few definitions.

In saying that we receive the Bible as the word of God, we distinguish between the word of God and the words of God. We do not mean that all of its words are words of God; for some of them are recorded as the words of angels, some as the words of men, some as those of demons, and some as those of Satan. We mean that it is God's word in the sense that God, by the inspiration of its writers, caused to be written this record of things that were said and done by himself and certain of his creatures.

In saying that we receive this book as the only rule of faith, we mean, first, that we receive all of its utterances as true in the sense which properly belongs to them, and therefore as objects of belief; and second, that nothing else, as a matter of religious belief, is to be required of us. Of course this does not bind us to any book now printed in the Bible which may prove to have been improperly inserted, or to any passage in any book which may prove to be an uninspired interpolation. In receiving it as the only rule of

practice, we bind ourselves in conscience to observe all that it appoints for us to do, distinguishing what it appoints for us from what it appointed for others in former dispensations; and we refuse to be bound by anything which it does not thus appoint. [11]

By the "we" in our proposition, is meant, not the writer of this essay, nor the writers of the essays in this volume, nor the particular body of disciples with which these writers are identified; but all, everywhere, who do thus receive the Bible. Many, it is true, receive the Bible as the word of God who do not receive it as the only rule of faith and practice; and we shall accordingly divide the question, discussing first the grounds on which the book is received in the former sense, and afterward the grounds on which it is received in the latter sense.

There is still another distinction which must be noted before we enter upon our principal theme. While the "we" whose grounds of belief are to be stated, includes all believers, all do not receive it on the same grounds. There is a great diversity in this respect. In order that all may be properly represented in the statements which are to be made, it is necessary to present these various grounds, and to consider them separately. Believers may be divided, in reference to their grounds of belief, into three classes; first, the uneducated, who have never made a study of the evidences of Christianity; second, the more intelligent class, who have paid more or less attention to the subject, but have never studied it systematically; and third, those who have investigated the subject exhaustively. This classification of believers shall guide us in marking divisions in this part of our essay.

I. THE NARROWEST GROUND OF BELIEF.

A large majority of the believers of this age, and of every age except the earliest, have received the Bible as the word of God on the one and only ground that they have been so educated. They have been trained from their earliest childhood to look upon the Bible as a sacred book; to reverence it as a most precious gift from God; to abhor unbelief in reference to it as a deadly sin, and to tremble when the least shadow of doubt [12] concerning it passes across their minds. They have learned to estimate the truth of all other writings by their agreement or disagreement with this; and they fully expect to be judged by it in the day of final accounts. If they are called upon to give a reason for this implicit faith, they seldom go farther than to answer, "We have been brought up to believe the Bible; our fathers and mothers before us have believed it; and we have, never thought of doubting it."

This ground of faith has not received the respectful consideration to which it is entitled. It is often stigmatized as purely traditional and unreasoning; and so it appears to be. But is it any the less valuable on this account? On what depends the value of faith in anything that is of a practical nature? On the reasons which the believer can give for his faith? or on the firmness with which he maintains his faith, and the exactness with which he puts it into practice? Faith in the genuineness of medicines in the skill of physicians, in the honesty of men of business, in the accuracy of interest tables and of logarithms, in the constancy of friendship and of marital vows, in everything on which life and well-being depend, derives its value from the latter consideration, and not at all from the former. If the religion taught in the Bible is true, the blessings which it offers to men are bestowed on those who believe, and who live in accordance with their faith, without the slightest regard to the reasons or the causes which induced them to believe. This is true not only of the blessings which it offers as the special gifts of God, but also of those noble traits of character which this faith brings forth as its natural fruits. Not one of these is dependent on the reasons which induce men to believe. This fact cannot be emphasized too strongly.

This ground of faith has been pronounced not only traditional and unreasoning, but insufficient for the trials to which faith must be subjected. For some persons it has proved insufficient; and these have either abandoned the faith, or found [13] better ground for believing; but it has proved sufficient for the majority of believers in ages past, and it will for ages to come. If the good results of faith are dependent, not on the causes of it, but on its steadfastness and its fruits, it follows that a faith which does not waver, and which brings forth these fruits to the end of life, has a sufficient basis in which to rest. The faith of the class now under consideration does remain steadfast to the end, and it does bring forth the required fruits. Myriads of them are now living, and myriads more have gone to rest, the shield of whose faith was never pierced by a single dart of unbelief. These believers met the arguments of infidelity, so far as they encountered them, with a smile or a frown, according to the temperament of each; they pitied the infidel as an unfortunate and wayward man; they turned to their Bibles with greater confidence and affection in proportion as it was assailed; they walked humbly with their God, and truly with their neighbors; and in the hour of death they were not afraid. It is offered as an objection, that the same may be truly said of faith in other books, supposed to be sacred, and in other religions which are conceded to be of human origin. As respects the ground of faith, this must be admitted; but what follows? It does not follow that all books and religions thus received are equally true and equally beneficial to their adherents. The claims of each to be true depend on the evidences which can be adduced in its favor; and this is supposed to be beyond the ken of the humble believers of whom we now speak. If any one of these religions is true and divine, the believer in it reaps all the good fruits of it; and if any is false, the believer in it reaps all the good that is in it, if any, and he also just as certainly tastes all the bitter fruits which a false system must necessarily bear. The objection, then, is without weight; and the ground on which a countless host of God's children have rested their faith is vindicated. It has proved sufficient for them, though many of them have [14] passed through much tribulation to the region in which they had laid up their treasures.

II. BROADER GROUNDS OF BELIEF.

The preceding ground, satisfying as it is to the mass of uneducated believers, has proved insufficient for those who, either from the natural questionings of awakened thought, or from the attacks of unbelievers, have been constrained to ask whether education has guided them aright. All these inquire for the grounds on which their teachers have taught them, and they pass into the second or into the third class mentioned above, according to the extent of their subsequent investigations.

1. Most commonly, the first new ground to which these awakened minds advance, is this: they look to see who the teachers of their faith are; and they find that they constitute the overwhelming majority of the good, the wise and the learned, of this and of all past ages up to the age in which the Bible became a completed book. They see that these men constitute the class best informed on the subject, and most likely, both on this account and on account of their goodness of heart, to decide the question correctly. They ascertain, too, that many of these men were converted from unbelief to belief, as the result of their investigations; and although they find that some have reversed this process, the number of the latter is so small in comparison as not to seriously affect the evidence.

That this is solid ground on which to stand is made more obvious when we reflect that it is the very ground on which the deductions of science are received by the mass of mankind. We accept what we are taught concerning the geography of distant lands, concerning geology, astronomy, chemistry, and the facts of all history, because we have confidence in our teachers; and if their deductions are called in question by a [15] man here and there, it is sufficient for us that his objections amount to nothing in the estimation of the great majority of those who are competent judges. It is only the very few who are competent to investigate

these sciences for themselves; and the rest of us are never reproached because we accept our faith from their hands. Scientific men who are thus credited by their less-informed neighbors, should be the last men on earth to censure Christians for receiving the Bible on similar ground.

It is said, however, that this ground of faith depends entirely on the circumstance that in the past the majority has been on the side of belief, and that should the majority at some future time turn the other way, the argument would be reversed, and would become equally strong in favor of unbelief. This is unquestionably true. The argument would be reversed, and the state of opinion among the common people would be reversed with it. This would be true on any ground of faith, for the common people always have been and always will be governed in their opinions on all subjects by the conclusions of the great majority of those who are known to be more competent judges than themselves. Should infidelity ever secure this majority, the Bible, having lost the officers of its army, would of course be deserted by the rank and file. But we need not anticipate such a day. If the Bible is from God, it can never come.

2. Others of the class now under consideration, while holding firmly to the ground of faith last mentioned, look still farther, and, considering the effects which faith in the Bible has had on all true and consistent believers, they find that these effects are good and only good continually. They find that only those believers who have not conformed their lives to the requirements of the book have failed to realize these good effects; and that those who have conformed to it most nearly have been the purest and best of men. They cannot believe [16] that such traits are wrought into human character by the belief of a book whose writers are impostors, and whose distinctive claim for itself is a falsehood. They cannot believe this, because they have learned by their own experience, and by that of those who have gone before them, that the belief of falsehood is injurious to men, while the belief of truth alone is truly and permanently beneficial. Many eminent unbelievers have themselves admitted that the highest ideal of human life would be attained if men would live according to the requirements of this book, and thus out of their own mouths we confirm the solidity of this ground of belief.

A feeble attempt has been made to offset this argument by pointing to a very few men in heathen lands who have lived very noble lives and taught a very pure morality, though they never saw or heard of the Bible; but to this it is truly answered that the life of the noblest man who ever lived in heathen lands cannot compare to those of thousands who have believed the Bible; and that only so far as the lives and precepts of these noble heathens are in harmony with the teachings of the Bible, is there anything in them to be admired. The fact, then, instead of being an objection to our argument, only confirms it by furnishing additional proof of the ennobling effects of that which our Bible teaches.

3. A third ground for the faith of the second class of believers is one not so easily defined, but fully as substantial as either of the preceding. It is the stamp of truthfulness which is felt rather than seen as they read the Bible and reflect on its contents. They have observed that false narratives, even when most plausible, have an indefinable air or tone about them which awakens suspicion and causes us to pause and hesitate about receiving them; and that, on the other hand, there is an air or tone about truth which asserts itself and dissipates doubt. It is comparable to the ring of a sound bell, or of a piece of sound porcelain, as distinguished from that of one [17] slightly cracked. More profound thinkers may be able to analyze and define the characteristics of truth and error alluded to, but our second class of believers make no such attempt. The human mind is made for the reception of truth, and when it is uncorrupted it has a natural susceptibility to truth, analogous to that of the eye to light, and of the ear to sound, which enables it within certain limits to recognize both truth and falsehood. This instinct is no guide in matters of a purely scientific character; but in matters of history and morals it will assert itself, and its promptings are often

irresistible. A juryman is often led by it to decide cases of property and life, when the explicit testimony would have led him in the opposite direction. Now those of whom I speak feel, as they read their Bibles from day to day and year to year, that they are in mental and spiritual contact with narratives and precepts which have the ring of truth about them. They feel this so distinctly, and it impresses them so deeply, that they cannot shake it off if they would, and they cannot attempt to do so without doing violence to their moral nature.

It will be admitted that if God were in any proper sense the author of the Bible, it would bear these marks of its own truthfulness. Indeed, if he inspired its authors, he must have desired that his creatures should believe its statements and observe its precepts; and he would certainly impart this very quality to it. The fact, then, that the Bible has the identical effect on a vast multitude of its readers which its author must have designed if that author is God, is no mean proof that God is its author. This evidence can have but little effect on those who are as yet unbelievers, and who consequently do not receive the impression we refer to; but it is solid and satisfactory evidence to all those who have for this and other reasons combined received the book as true, and studied it for the good that is in it.

4. The next ground on which we plant our feet is found in [18] the incomparable character of Him who is the central figure in the panorama which the Bible spreads out before us. Friends and foes alike admit that Jesus who is called the Christ occupies this position. He is the centre and soul of the New Testament, and, whether unbelievers will have it or not, the law and the prophets all pointed to him as their end. Now when we consider who the writers of the Bible were, what they were in their education, in their prejudices, in their hopes, and in their conceptions of humanity, we are driven to the conclusion that it was impossible for them to either conceive or depict such a character as Jesus. This argument has been set forth by eloquent writers in whole volumes; and it has often been said that the conception and portrayal of such a character by these writers without divine inspiration would have been a greater miracle than any which Jesus is said to have wrought. Of course the word miracle is here used in its etymological sense of a mere wonder, and not in its scriptural sense of an immediate act of God. Though so often and so confidently published to the world, this argument has never met with a serious answer, so far as the present writer is informed. Until it shall be proved to be without force, we must be allowed to still believe that the Bible is the book of God, for this reason, even if we should be compelled to lay aside all others.

5. As a result of mature reflection on the last two grounds of faith, there spreads out before the believer another field of evidence, in which he beholds a wondrous adaptation of this book to the spiritual wants of our fallen race. That we are sinners before God, is the profound conviction of every thoughtful soul who realizes the existence of a divine being to whom we are responsible for our conduct. Every such person feels the need of something to impress upon him a keener sense of his unworthiness, to deliver him from the guilt which he has already incurred, and to give him ability to resist the enticements of sin. He looks in vain for deliverance and strength to [19] all the systems of human philosophy, and to all the religions of earth except that of the Bible. In the revelations of this book he finds what he desires; or rather, he finds that which, whether consciously sought or not, meets and satisfies the longings of his soul. He finds in this book, as he thoughtfully and believingly reads it, power to subdue his stubborn will, and to bring him in humble penitence to the foot-stool of the God whom it reveals. He finds in the tender mercy there offered to him through the atoning blood of a wondrous Redeemer, whose work is the characteristic and the glory of this religious system, the only conceivable release from the burden of his guilt; for only in forgiveness, free and final, can the guilty soul find peace. Receiving this heavenly gift, he enjoys a peace of mind which passes all understanding. Starting forward afresh in the journey of life, he finds the same good book

furnishing him with hopes, and gratitude, and courage, which enable him to control himself as no other man can, by maxims of wisdom and holiness which gradually transform him into the spiritual image of his God, and fit him to dwell with God forever. With this experience, he cannot doubt that the book which has enabled him to attain it, and which claims to be the word of God, is all that it claims to be.

6. Some of the class of believers now under consideration have extended their readings into general history and the history of the church. All such have learned that the claim of the Bible to be the word of God has passed through fiery trials in the course of its history, such as would long since have brought it into contempt had it not been too well grounded to be overthrown. If the book had come down through the ages unchallenged, the continued hold which it had on the confidence of men would argue little in its favor; but instead of this, its claim has been hotly contested by men of genius and learning from the second century after Christ until the present time. All manner of literary weapons have been wielded against it, [20] including the sneers of scoffers, the ridicule of the giddy and profligate, the criticisms of men of letters, the deductions of philosophers, and the researches of historians. Decipherers of manuscripts and hieroglyphics, students of archæology, delvers in the bowels of the earth, explorers of the solar system and of the stellar universe, analyzers of historical documents, and experts in comparative philology, have unitedly and separately assailed the Bible, many times proclaiming that they had put all of its friends to flight, and that soon it would have no intelligent man to uphold its claims; but through all these conflicts it has passed without loss in the number of its friends, and not only without loss, but with an ever-increasing number who insist that it is the word of God. The enemies of the book are boldly challenged to tell how this can be, if the high claim set up for it is false, or even doubtful.

This challenge is answered by the statement that the tenacious hold which the Bible has on the minds of men is the result of superstition, and of an obstinate conservatism which is natural to our race. The answer is refuted by the fact that it is not the superstitious part of our race, nor the part most given to blind conservatism, that has thus clung to the Bible. That portion of the race most given to these two weaknesses is found where the Bible is unknown, or is made subordinate to other rules of faith, as among Mohammedans and Buddhists. On the other hand, those nations which have shown themselves freest of all from superstition, and quickest of all to cast aside old errors and to seize upon new truths, are the very nations which have clung most tenaciously to the Bible. Not only so, but the class of men in these nations most noted for faith in the Bible, includes in it leaders in human thought in every department of learning. To such an extent is this true, that when unbelievers of real learning and talent have for a time become leaders of great bodies of men, they have, as a rule, soon lost their leadership as a result of defeat in the conflicts which [21] their attacks on the Bible have provoked. More than two or three might be named, who, in the memory of persons now living, have attained to such leadership and then lost it.

Now this whole series of battles has been fought over the single question, whether the Bible is the word of God, in the sense of our proposition. The proposition has thus far been so triumphantly maintained as to inspire us with the strongest conviction that it is true, and that it will continue to be maintained in the estimation of an ever increasing number of persons, until at last there shall be none to call it in question. The Bible has to-day an immensely wider recognition among men than at any previous period in its history. More copies of it are now annually published and sold than ever before; more, perhaps, than of any one thousand other books combined. It is printed and read as no other book ever has been or ever will be, in all the languages of the earth which have an alphabet, while many of these languages have been provided with alphabets for the very purpose that the Bible might be printed in them. It is one of the most wonderful events of this present century of wonders, that on May 1st, 1881, when the Revised

Version of the English New Testament was published, more than one million copies were sold in a single day, and this among the people of all the earth who already had in hand the largest number of New Testaments. There is nothing comparable to this in the history of books. These facts guarantee that its power over the next generation will be far greater and more world-wide than it is now. Indeed, if we judge the future by the rules of ordinary foresight, the facilities which now exist for the free circulation of this book throughout the world, and the multitude of rich and powerful friends who esteem it a high privilege to expend fabulous sums of money to put it into the hands of every human being, argue a future for it which is far more glorious than its most enthusiastic friends have dreamed, or Christian poets have sung. [22]

A book with such a history and such prospects, all due to the fact that it is believed to be the word of God, cannot be standing on a false claim, if there is any such thing as distinguishing between documents that are false and those that are true. On this ground we rest our faith; and we feel that in doing so we would be standing on a rock, if there was nothing else beneath our feet. But we stand not on this alone. We step backward and forward on the six different grounds which we have enumerated, with no uncertainty in our tread; and when we think of them all, we realize that the believer has within his reach, if he will reflect soberly, and read but a little outside of his Bible, abundant evidence to satisfy an honest soul, and to defend his faith against the assaults of unbelief.

III. THE BROADEST GROUNDS OF BELIEF.

The third class of believers is composed of those who have made a thorough, systematic and scientific investigation of all the grounds on which an intelligent faith can rest. They have pursued the following lines of inquiry, though not always in the order in which we name them.

1. Knowing that all books written so long ago as the books of the Bible, were transmitted to posterity for many centuries by means of manuscript copies not always made with proper care; and that some ancient books have undergone changes from this cause such as to render the latest copies extremely inaccurate; they have first inquired as to the preservation of the text of the sacred books, so as to know whether they have suffered in like manner. They are aware that even were the Bible originally the word of God, it is valueless now, if human hands have changed it to such an extent that we cannot know what parts remain as they were first written; and they also know that if any part remains unchanged, this much is still the word of God if it was so at the beginning. If this [23] inquiry ends in proving that the books have lost their essential character in transmission, we need to proceed no farther with our investigation; but if otherwise, we then take another step, and inquire into their origin and original character.

It is perhaps impossible to copy a book of considerable size with a pen, without making some mistakes; and the more frequently it is thus copied, each copyist using the work of his predecessor, the greater the number of mistakes in the later copies. The multiplication of copies is the multiplication of errors. Not so with printing. On the contrary, when the types are once correctly set, all copies printed from them are exactly alike, and they may be multiplied to any extent without mistakes. As a consequence, the inquiry as to the preservation of the text of the Bible is limited in time to the period between its first composition and the invention of printing, or, at the latest, to the time when printing became an accurate art. This was in the early part of the sixteenth century, the first printed copy of any part of the Bible having been put to press about the middle of the century previous. Errors of copyists then came to an end, and our question is, how many and how serious were the errors introduced previous to that time?

The investigation of this question was begun in earnest about the close of the seventeenth century, and it has been prosecuted with great diligence till the present time. Many eminent men have devoted their whole lives to it, and others, the labor of many years. They have ransacked the ancient libraries of Europe, Africa and western Asia, in search of manuscript copies of the New Testament, and have found more than two thousand of them, some containing the whole New Testament, but the great majority only parts of it. These they have compared with one another, word by word, and letter by letter, noting every variation. They have also taken up the ancient translations of the book, determined the Greek words from which the renderings in them were made, and compared these [24] with the words of the manuscripts. In most instances the translations thus used were made from Greek copies of an earlier date than that of any manuscript now in existence; and thus they represent a Greek text nearer to the autographs of the sacred penmen. They have also gathered out of the writings of early Christian authors, authors who lived anterior to the date of existing manuscripts, the quotations which they made from copies in use in their days, and have compared these with the same passages in versions and existing manuscripts. Having thus exhausted the sources of information as to how these books have read, in every line and word, and in every age of their existence, they have qualified themselves to state with the certainty of exact knowledge, to what extent the text of the New Testament has been preserved in its original form. The results may be briefly stated as follows:

a. The manuscripts, versions and quotations agree to such an extent as to leave no doubt as to the original reading of seven-eighths of the whole text, in word and letter. In other words, seven-eighths of the words originally written in these books have been preserved in existing copies precisely as they were at first. This much is unquestionably the word of God now, if it ever was.

b. So large a number of the variations between copies consist in mere mistakes in spelling, which do not obscure the identity of the misspelt words, that when these are taken out of the account, as they should be, fifty-nine sixtieths of all the words are found to be unchanged.

c. The number of changes in the text which affect the meaning, and require the skill of the critic to determine the original reading, is only about one-thousandth part of the whole, and these have been so marked in printed copies by textual critics, that a scholar can put his finger on every one of them.

d. By combining the results of these investigations, and [25] throwing out from the text known errors, textual critics have now presented us with a Greek Testament which contains the exact words written by its authors, and this without the least doubt, except in specified instances.

e. An examination of the few passages of which the readings are still doubtful, reveals the fact that if we should erase from the book all of these passages, we would lose from our New Testament not a single precept, promise, or fact, of material importance; for all such which might be affected by the erasure are found in other passages, which are undoubtedly genuine.

f. These results are accessible not to the learned alone; but they have been placed within the reach of all who can read the English language, by means of the Revised English version. This version is not only translated from the corrected Greek text, but it exhibits in marginal notes, intelligible to the unlearned reader, every word in regard to the genuineness of which there remains the least doubt, and it indicates the degree of doubtfulness which attaches to each.

On the question, then, of the preservation of the original text of the New Testament, a question which was once regarded as fraught with extreme danger to the cause of the Bible, all apprehension has passed

away; the enemies of the book are silenced, and its friends are satisfied. For all time to come, unless the art of printing shall be lost, the question will never be raised again. It is, indeed, one of the marvels of this marvelous age, that now, after the passage of seventeen centuries, we have a purer text of the Greek New Testament than has existed since the second century after Christ.

In regard to the original text of the Old Testament, the investigation has not been completed, and the results are not so definite. Enough has been accomplished, however, to justify the following statements:

a. From the second to the sixth century after Christ, a [26] succession of learned Jews, some living in Palestine and some in Babylon, devoted themselves to the critical study of the text of their Bible, and brought into use such rules to govern copyists that the variations between copies made at that time are fewer and more insignificant by far than in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

b. So far as can be judged from quotations made from the Old Testament previous to the time mentioned, and by the translations into other tongues, the text had not suffered materially before these stringent rules were adopted.

c. While this is true, it is ascertained that in some of the books there are interpolations and verbal alterations made by editors and copyists, but of such a character that they are easily separated from the text, and that they do not materially affect the meaning of the passages in which they occur. There are also mistakes in names and figures, many of which are corrected in the context.

d. It is highly probable that there are other changes of the text which have not been detected and pointed out; but it is highly improbable that these are any more serious than those mentioned above in the New Testament. We therefore feel safe in the present state of our knowledge, and can patiently await the results of further investigation.

2. Having thus ascertained that the text of the Bible has been preserved to us with all the accuracy necessary to practical purposes, we have next inquired whether the several books can be traced back to the authors to whom they are ascribed.

This task has been accomplished with respect to the New Testament by evidence so incontestable that even the most hostile critics admit it in regard to the Apocalypse and four of the most important Epistles, viz., Romans, First and Second Corinthians, and Galatians. While denying the genuineness of Luke's Gospel, Acts of Apostles, Hebrews, Colossians, and Ephesians, they assign these to dates near the close of the first [27] century; and they place all the others between the years 115 and 150, except Second Peter, which they bring down nearly to the year 200. As the period within which all of the books purport to have been written is the second half of the first century, unbelief is crowded into very narrow ground by the evidence which has extorted from it these admissions. This evidence is that of ancient manuscript copies of the Greek Testament, of which we have two still existing that were written in the fourth century; that of catalogues, or lists of the books, made out by early Christians, of which we have a succession reaching back into the second century; that of translations into other tongues, of which we have two reaching to the middle of the same century, which was in the life time of men who knew the Apostles; that of quotations made from them by early writers, of which we have some from most of the books and made by men who knew some of the Apostles; and that furnished by the contents of the books themselves, which, in the case of every book, is satisfactory, and is very strong for some for which the external evidence is comparatively weak. With this evidence, so nearly overcoming the resistance of the most determined foes of the Bible, we are satisfied; and we believe that all the books in our New Testament were written in the

apostolic age; and that they were written by the men whose names they bear, with the exception of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as to the authorship of which there is difference of opinion among believers.

In regard to the Old Testament, the evidence on this branch of our inquiry, like that in regard to the text, is not so complete, owing to the remoteness of the period into which the inquiry leads us, and the consequent scarcity of documents from which to derive evidence. In the time of Christ all of these books unquestionably existed, and constituted, as they do now, the sacred Scriptures of the Jews. Furthermore, they had all been translated into Greek, and had been circulated in the version called the Septuagint, or Alexandrian version, for at least one [28] hundred and fifty years before Christ: for it is now conceded that this version was completed not later than the year 150 B. C., and that the first part of it was made as early as 280 B. C. This is demonstrative proof that the books existed far back toward the time when the latest of them was composed. This much is universally conceded by unbelievers, and our field of inquiry, in point of time, lies back of that period.

All the historical books of the Old Testament, together with the book of Job, are anonymous: that is, they do not name their authors. So far as their authors are known at all, they are known from the testimony of other writers; and the correctness of our knowledge depends on the reliability of this testimony. The most reliable of these witnesses are unquestionably Christ and his Apostles. They ascribe the Pentateuch to Moses; the prophets, so far as they quote them, to the men whose names they bear; and some of the Psalms to David, who is represented in the book itself as the composer of about half of the collection. Concerning the other anonymous books they give no specific testimony; but they give us a general warrant for receiving all, in that all were parts of the sacred Scriptures which they in a general way cited as the word of God. This usage does not imply the certainty that no book, or part of a book, had been improperly placed in the collection; but it does imply that no large amount of that kind of work had been done--none which would render improper the general designation of the collection as the word of God.

Much controversy has existed over the genuineness of most of these books, and the antiquity of others; and unbelievers have not hesitated to reject some which are endorsed by Jesus and the Apostles. It would require a large volume to set forth the points of argument in this controversy, and of course it cannot be attempted in this essay. It is sufficient for our present purpose to say that the principal ground on which we receive the Old Testament as the word of God is that named above, the [29] testimony of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. This is sufficient for all the demands of the Christian faith; and if it fails to support any particular book, on that book our faith will be found not at all dependent.

3. Next after the inquiries concerning the preservation of the text of the Bible, and the genuineness of its books, comes the question, whether the facts recorded in it are credible, and its revelations reliable. If they are, we can trust the Bible implicitly as the word of God; if not, the conclusions which we have thus far reached are without value.

There are historical tests by which the credibility of historical documents is determined. We first inquire as to the sources of information accessible to the writers, and used by them. If they speak from personal observation, being honest men, or from the testimony of eyewitnesses, they have the highest degree of credibility as regards the facts recorded. If they are more remote from the facts, their credibility diminishes proportionately. As regards the New Testament writers, if all of them except the author of the Apocalypse, and the author of the four great Pauline Epistles lived after the death of the generation in which the events transpired, as is claimed by unbelievers, their knowledge was traditional, and their records unreliable. This consideration accounts for the unanimity with which this hypothesis is maintained by unbelievers. But if

these writings were all composed, as believers have to their own satisfaction made out, by the men to whom they are credited, then they are historical documents of the first degree of credibility, according to accepted rules of evidence. The latter conclusion has been established by the evidences which we have stated above.

The second method of testing such documents is to compare them with other histories of the same period, and note the agreements and disagreements. This comparison has been made in two ways: first, by comparing the references which other writers [30] make to New Testament facts with the New Testament accounts of them; and second, by treating in like manner the New Testament allusions to events more fully set forth, by these other writers. In both ways the sacred books stand the test; for although a few contradictions have been alleged, not one has been made out. On the contrary, a remarkable harmony has been found to exist, a harmony which, when we remember that all these other writers were hostile to the religion set forth in the New Testament, is accounted for only on the supposition of the reality of the facts involved in the comparison.

The third test is a close comparison of these documents with one another, where they refer to the same matters, to see whether or not their representations are harmonious. This comparison takes into view not only the explicit statements which the writers make, but also allusions made by one to events described by another. The enemies of the book have gone over this ground, from side to side, and end to end, searching as with a microscope, for inconsistencies; and they have paraded alleged inconsistencies in such numbers as to appall the inexperienced reader when he first encounters them. So confident are they in the correctness of their specifications, that they commonly treat with supreme contempt the man who denies it. Yet believing scholars have followed them step by step, and proved in reference to every specification, that it is either a false charge, or a charge based on some illogical assumption. A contradiction exists only when two statements are made which cannot both be true. If, on any rational hypothesis whatever, both may be true, whether they can both be proved to be true or not, there is no proof of a contradiction. After making a fair allowance for transcriptional errors, no such contradiction has been proved between any two New Testament writers; and if none has yet been proved, it is not at all probable that one will ever be.

Not content with this merely negative result, believers have also gone through the New Testament books, both historical and [31] epistolary, in search of internal evidences of their truthfulness; and they have found a multitude of purely incidental agreements between them, which can be accounted for only on the supposition that they all wrote with the most minute accuracy. Many of these coincidences are found in the midst of apparent discrepancies, where they lay hidden until the appearance of discrepancy was dissolved by closer scrutiny, and the unseen agreement, surprisingly brought to light. The result of the whole inquiry is not only the triumphant vindication of the New Testament writers from the charge of contradiction, but the demonstration of the fact that they are the most authentic writers known to literature.

In regard to one particular class of events, the miraculous, unbelievers contest the preceding conclusion with the most desperate persistency.

It is impossible for a man to remain an infidel and believe the miraculous events recorded in the New Testament; consequently the acceptance or rejection of these is the crucial test of man's faith in Christ. Every argument which philosophy, history and science could suggest has been brought to bear against their credibility, but these have all been refuted again and again by believers. We shall not attempt in this essay to go over the ground of this argumentation, for the two reasons, that it is too voluminous, and that

there is a shorter way. After all that has been said on both sides, the question turns finally on the evidence for a single miracle, without which all of the others would have occurred in vain, and which, if it be established as real, carries all the others with it. We mean the resurrection of Jesus. No man who believes this event cares to deny any other material fact mentioned in the New Testament; and if a man denies this, it is a small matter if he denies everything else.

The direct evidence for this event is stronger than that for any other event in ancient history. It consists primarily of the [32] testimony of men and women who had been intimate with Jesus before his death, and who saw him alive after his crucifixion and burial. We receive the testimony of four of these witnesses directly from their own pens; that of the Apostles Matthew and John in their Gospels, and that of John, Peter and Paul in their Epistles, and in the Apocalypse. Paul, it is true, was not familiar with the person of Jesus before his death, but his testimony has peculiar characteristics which render it not less reliable than that of any other witness. The testimony of the other witnesses also comes to us through these men, and through the writings of Mark and Luke, who were companions of all the witnesses, and had every possible opportunity to know what their testimony was. The competency of these witnesses, both with respect to their capacity for correct observation and their opportunities for correct knowledge, is so manifest to every careful reader of the accounts, that it is not too much to say that no well informed and candid reader doubts it. Their honesty in giving the testimony was subjected to the severest tests, by the losses, afflictions and persecutions which befell them on account of it; and each succeeding generation since their own, on considering these tests, declares them honest witnesses by so vast a majority, including many infidels, that the few who doubt it prove by the doubt that their minds are in an abnormal condition. The number of the witnesses has also been found to be sufficient, as is proved by the fact, that no believer thinks his faith would be stronger if the witnesses were more numerous, and that no unbeliever claims, that were the witnesses more numerous he would believe. Forasmuch, then, as the witnesses are sufficiently numerous, are thoroughly competent and unquestionably honest, it is impossible to have stronger testimony; and therefore it is impossible to establish any fact which depends on human testimony more firmly.

These considerations present the force of the evidence from a positive point of view. It is equally strong when viewed [33] negatively, as when we demand of the unbeliever to account for the disappearance of the dead body of Jesus, on any other hypothesis than that of his resurrection; and when we further demand of him, to account for the unquestioning belief of these witnesses, that they saw him alive, conversed with him, and handled his person, as is recorded. To the former of these demands, some of the older infidels have responded, by denying that he actually died on the cross, and by affirming that he died naturally in the tomb, and disappeared by going elsewhere and remaining in retirement until he died like other men. This hypothesis encounters so many objections which readily present themselves to those acquainted with the narratives, that it has been adopted by very few, and it has been refuted by none more successfully than by later unbelievers. With almost one voice, recent infidel writers unite with believers in holding that Jesus was certainly dead when he was placed in the tomb. Most of these have deliberately shunned the question, what became of the body? and Christian Baur goes so far as to declare that the question is outside of historical inquiry,¹ thus putting outside of historical inquiry the most momentous event, if it be an event, of which history speaks--an event which, whether real or not, has affected human history more profoundly than any other that ever transpired on the earth. To refuse inquiry into such a fact, and this too, while writing a history of the church, is to acknowledge that no account of it could be given which would not put to shame the man who does not believe it. Other infidels, notably Strauss and Renan, have attempted to account for the disappearance of the body;² but their attempts are so futile that Prof.

Huxley repudiates them, and goes back to the old abandoned theory of a natural resuscitation. This he does in his recent controversy with Dr. Wace. The fact that nothing better than those vain and contradictory attempts have [34] been devised by infidels, a succession of whom for fourteen hundred years has been tugging at this problem, is conclusive proof, almost equal to the direct testimony itself, that the only way to account for the disappearance of the body is to admit that it was miraculously restored to life.

All parties, even those who deny the actual death of Jesus, admit that his disciples became convinced of his resurrection, and believed that they saw him alive repeatedly after his crucifixion. Various attempts have been made to account for this belief on the supposition that it was a delusion; but they are all so shallow and so false to the facts in the case that any tyro in discussion can answer them at sight--so shallow and unsatisfying that Christian Baur, after considering them all, and doubtless desiring, if he could, to accept some one of them, declares that no psychological analysis can account for this belief.³ We may say, then, that it is impossible for an infidel to account for either the belief of the first Christians, or the disappearance of the dead body of Jesus; and as it is impossible to have stronger proof than we have in the way of direct testimony, the resurrection of Jesus shall forever stand as one of the fixed events in human history, to be believed more and more till the end of time. This fact being established, the discussion about miracles, either those said to have been wrought by Jesus, or those wrought by his Apostles, is closed; and with this question is settled the question, whether the New Testament is a part of the word of God, and its teachings a divine rule of faith; for if these men wrought miracles in attestation of the truth of their utterances, the truth of these utterances is stamped with the seal of God.

The credibility of the Old Testament narratives, like the genuineness of the Old Testament books, is a more difficult question, because of the greater difficulty in applying to these [35] documents the tests of historical criticism. We know less about the authors of the books; far less about the tests of honesty and competency to which they were subjected; and the contemporary documents which remain to us are few and fragmentary. Still, we have sufficient ground, apart from the inspiration of the writers, for believing that in these books we have a record of facts.

The serious and religious character of the books indicates that the authors were aiming to tell the truth; and there are other internal evidences of honesty of purpose. So far as their statements can be tested by contemporaneous documents, such as Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions, their accuracy is confirmed. When the same transactions are mentioned in different books, some discrepancies are found in figures and names; but these are accounted for by the known liability of transcribers to make more frequent mistakes in such matters than in others. On the other hand, a careful examination of parallel passages in the different books reveals a large number of minute and undesigned coincidences which are accounted for only by extreme accuracy of statement. The geographical and political allusions, too, in which the books abound, are all so exact as to prove not only accuracy of statement, but fullness of knowledge.

But above all, the credibility of the Old Testament narrations is proved by the testimony of Jesus Christ and the Apostles. They cite as real many of the very facts in the Old Testament record, which are pronounced by unbelievers the most incredible. We may enumerate among these, the creation of the first human pair, and the account of the origin of woman; the temptation and the fall of this pair; the destruction of human and animal life by the flood; the miraculous destruction of Sodom, together with the rescue of Lot and the fate of his wife; the call of Abraham, the promises made to him, and his trial by the call to sacrifice his son; the afflictions and the restoration of Job; the miracles in Egypt, at the Red Sea and [36] in the wilderness; the fall of Jericho; the miraculous preservation of Jonah in the bowels of the fish; the three

years' drouth in the days of Elijah, begun and terminated in answer to prayer; the healing of Naaman by Elisha, and others. Now the acceptance of these events as real by Jesus and the Apostles, is sufficient ground for their acceptance by all who believe in Jesus. Bat the evidence reaches farther than these particular events; for unless there were reasons for accepting these which did not apply to other Old Testament events, we must conclude that the latter were accepted also, and that Jesus and the Apostles held all the Old Testament history to be authentic. No such reasons have been alleged; and certainly such a distinction cannot be based on the greater inherent credibility of the events quoted and endorsed; for with the single exception of the miracle of causing the sun to stand still in its course, nothing so wonderful as some of these is on record, Moreover, the manner in which the Old Testament was constantly cited by these authorities precludes the supposition that they had in mind any such distinction. It follows that Jesus and the Apostles endorse the Old Testament as real history. More solid ground than this for believing we cannot have, and we do not desire.

If the contents of the Bible consisted only in facts which passed under the personal observation of the writers, evidence additional to that already adduced would scarcely be called for. But much of the record has respect to past events, which could not have been witnessed by the writers; much to matters in the spiritual world which men in the flesh could not know by their unaided powers; much to the will and the thoughts of God, alike inscrutable; and much to the distant future which no mortal vision can penetrate. In order that the statements of the writers on such subjects may be taken into our creed, we must have satisfactory evidence that they enjoyed supernatural means of obtaining and imparting knowledge. If they did, this not only gives good ground for believing them on these [37] topics, but it also imparts a new element of certainty to their statements on matters of ordinary history. Thus we reach the question of the inspiration of the Bible writers, and we see the necessity for settling this question before our survey of the grounds of faith will be complete.

Of the inspiration of the Apostles, those who have accepted the deduction already reached in this essay need no better proof and can have none better than the statements of the Apostles themselves; seeing they are proved to be reliable in their statements even in regard to miraculous events. Their statements show that Christ, previous to his death, promised to bestow upon the Twelve such an impartation of the Holy Spirit, that when called on to answer for themselves before earthly rulers they should not be anxious as to how or what they should speak; that they should not even premeditate; but that the Holy Spirit would give them in that hour what they should say: "For," said he, "it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you." He told them also, without special reference to their arraignment before rulers, that the Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance which he had spoken to them, and guide them into all the truth. As sure as those promises were fulfilled, when we read what the Apostles said and wrote after the fulfillment, we must receive it as not coming from them alone, but from the Spirit of God, with whom there can be no falsehood or mistake. To speak of a lapse of memory in the writing is to deny the fulfillment of the promise.

That these promises were fulfilled, we are assured by the author of Acts of Apostles, who was a witness of much that he records, and a reliable reporter of all. They began to be fulfilled on the first Pentecost after the resurrection, and the process continued throughout the lives of the Apostles, the Spirit constantly giving evidence of his continued presence in them by signs and wonders which accompanied their preaching. In addition to the evidence of this writer, we have that of some of [38] the Apostles themselves in their Epistles. Even in the four great epistles of Paul, which unbelievers acknowledge to be genuine, and to have been written by an honest man, there are repeated allusions to miracles which he wrought by

the Holy Spirit, and a most positive declaration that he received directly from the Spirit, in words taught by it, things which he revealed to his fellowmen. These miracles were his own acts, in regard to the reality of which he could not be mistaken, and therefore he either made false representations, which would nullify the admission of his honesty, or the miracles were real, and his claim to inspiration as real as the miracles which attested it. The same is true of the other Apostles. Believers, therefore, stand on the established fact, that the writers of the New Testament, so many as were Apostles, wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and that as a consequence they wrote without error on all the subjects within the range of their official utterances. As to those writers who were not apostles, they belong to the class to which the Apostles imparted a measure of the Spirit which they themselves possessed, and we believe that they also were inspired. It is true that Luke, who is one of these, claims to have acquired knowledge of what he writes concerning Jesus by careful inquiry from the eye-witnesses; but this, instead of being a denial of his own inspiration, as some have affirmed, only shows that he employed the natural means of gaining knowledge. It does not touch the question as to his guidance by the Spirit in discriminating between the true and the false, and in writing with proper accuracy that which he had learned.

The evidence of the inspiration of the Old Testament rests on somewhat different ground. The prophets all assert in some form their own inspiration, and their assertions are abundantly supported by the fulfillment of their predictions. The historical and poetical writers, as a rule, make no such claim, though their books contain many internal evidences of inspiration, which, in an elaborate discussion of the subject, it would be [39] proper to set forth. The most conclusive evidence, however, in reference to them all, is found in statements of the New Testament, and in this essay we shall content ourselves with presenting these:

a. Passages from nearly all the prophetic books of the Old Testament are quoted in the New as having been fulfilled by events in the career of Christ or in that of the Church. These citations were made, not to prove the inspiration of the prophets, but, being made to persons who believed the prophets, they were intended to show that the events which fulfilled them were brought about in accordance with the predetermined purpose and foreknowledge of God. But while they were made for this purpose, they also prove the inspiration of the prophets, seeing that only by direct inspiration could the latter have revealed the purpose and foreknowledge of God. So, then, these citations serve the double purpose of confirming the claims of Jesus, and proving the inspiration of the prophets. Some of them, it is true, are not predictions, but sayings of the prophets which found fulfillment as proverbs are fulfilled; but a sufficient number of them are actual predictions to answer the purpose of our argument. The fulfillments are obvious to our own understanding, and the recognition of them by Jesus and the Apostles assures us that our understanding does not mislead us.

b. As to the other books of the Old Testament, they are so quoted that their inspiration is either expressly or indirectly affirmed. Jesus quotes from Genesis the concluding verse in the account of the creation of woman, as the word of God (Matt. 19:4, 5,) and this it could not have been if the writer had not been divinely inspired. He quotes from Exodus the fifth commandment of the Decalogue, as both the word of Moses and the commandment of God (Mark 7:8-10); and it could have been neither had it not been written by Moses through revelation from God. He quotes a passage from Deuteronomy as the first of all the commandments, and one from Leviticus as the second (Mark 12:28-31, cf. Deut. 6:4; Lev. 19:8). He affirms that the words in [40] Exodus, represented as spoken by God to Moses at the burning bush, were the real words of God, and the book from which he quotes them he calls the book of Moses (Mark 12:26). Some of the Psalms are quoted in the same way. Jesus quotes one with the formula, "David said in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:35), thus affirming both its authorship by David and David's inspiration. Peter quotes

another Psalm, says that David wrote it, calls David a prophet, and says that he wrote the passage concerning the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:24-31); while all the Apostles unitedly declare that God spoke through the Holy Spirit by the mouth of his servant David, their father, in the second Psalm (Acts 4:24-27).

c. Besides these citations from particular books with the assertion of their inspiration, both Jesus and the Apostles make general statements of the same import concerning groups of books, and concerning the Old Testament as a whole. Jesus rebuked his disciples for not believing what the prophets had written about himself, and, "beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). He afterward said to the Twelve, "All things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44). But what things could have been written in any of these books concerning him, things which were prophetic and must be fulfilled, unless their authors wrote by divine inspiration? Again, Jesus rebuked his enemies for their unbelief, and said to them, "Think not that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one that will accuse you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:45-47). Here he not only recognizes certain writings as the writings of Moses, the very writings undoubtedly which his hearers ascribed to Moses; but he asserts that Moses wrote of him. But Moses could not have written of him fifteen hundred years before he was born, unless [41] he wrote by inspiration. Jesus probably refers in this citation more particularly to the passage in Deuteronomy, which the Apostle Peter also quotes and ascribes to Moses (Acts 3:22, 23), and which inspiration alone could have enabled him to write.

Passing by other citations which might be made, we content ourselves with a single one from the Apostle Paul, the well known declaration, "Every scripture inspired of God, is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," etc. If this passage were isolated, it would have no special bearing on our proposition; but it is immediately preceded by the remark to Timothy, "From a child thou hast known the sacred writings, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15-17). This shows that the scriptures of which he speaks are those in which Timothy had been instructed, and these were unquestionably our present Old Testament scriptures. These Paul represents as "inspired of God;" and that he believed them to be so is obvious not only from this passage, but from the way in which he cites them throughout his writings. Indeed, nothing is more certain than that Paul and all the Apostles regarded the Old Testament as a collection of inspired writings, and this alone should settle the question with all who regard the Apostles as inspired men.

In concluding this part of my argument, it may not be amiss to say, that in nothing which I have read from the pens of critics unfavorable to my conclusions, have I observed more sophistical reasoning than in their treatment of passages in the New Testament which are relied on to prove the inspiration of the Old. This is notably the case in the works of some writers who claim full faith in the infallibility of Jesus Christ.

We have now stated the grounds on which we receive the Bible as the word of God; and as we stand on the pinnacle of our last evidence, the inspiration of its writers, and look back over the field which we have traversed, every step which we have taken appears safer, and every part of the ground on which we [42] have stood appears firmer. We can now see, as we could not so clearly see at first, why it is that a mere education in the Christian faith fixes that faith so deeply in the soul that it can seldom be eradicated. It is because the sacre

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