

The Twofoldness of Divine Truth

by Robert Govett

The Bible contains one grand scheme, yet also exhibits seemingly opposed principles, which we must receive and act upon, trusting in God's wisdom and sovereignty.

Scripture: John 5:40, Acts 2:38, Acts 13:40, Acts 13:48, Acts 16:14, Acts 17:11, Acts 17:30, Ephesians 1:4, Philippians 2:12, 2 Thessalonians 2:13

Topics: "Sovereignty Of God", "Biblical Harmony"

Description

Robert Govett preaches about the twofoldness of truth in the Scripture, emphasizing the harmony of seemingly opposing doctrines found in the Bible. He explores the coexistence of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, the extent of redemption, the perseverance of the saints, justification by faith or works, the nature of God, the Saviour, worship, means of edification, the Church, the dispensations of God, the Word of God, and the status of men before God. Govett encourages embracing both sides of the truth presented in the Bible, acknowledging the complexity and depth of God's character and His Word.

Transcript

The oneness and harmony of Divine Truth as contained in the Scripture is a pleasing and profitable subject of contemplation. Though proceeding from so many pens, under such varied conditions, at dates so distant, the Bible contains but one grand scheme. Yet it must not be forgotten or denied that there are continually exhibited within its pages truths seemingly opposed to each other. To trace out some of these and set them before the reader, with the ground on which they are to be received, is the main object of this booklet.

The twofoldness of truth as offered to our view in Holy Writ is one strong argument of its not being the work of man. It is the glory of man's intellect to produce oneness. His aim is to trace different results to one principle, to clear it of ambiguities, to show how, through varied appearances, one law holds. Anything that stands in the way of the completeness of this, he eludes or denies, as something destructive of the glory and of the efficiency of his discovery. But it is not so with God.

In nature He is continually acting with two seemingly opposed principles. What keeps the planets moving in beautiful order around the sun? Not one force, but two--two forces pulling each particle of matter in two opposite directions at the same instant. Leave our earth to one of these and it would fly away into infinite space. Give undivided scope to the other, and the globe would soon be drawn down to the surface of the sun. But between the two forces it moves harmoniously on its way.

How is life supported? By two airs or gases of opposite qualities. If we breathed one of them alone, we would die quickly from the intense expenditure and exhaustion of the vital forces; place us in an unmingled atmosphere of the other, and life would be extinguished in a few minutes. The bodies in which we live are ever subject to the opposite action of two forces--by one the flesh and blood and bones are being continually taken to pieces; by the other, new particles are being continually added.

What is the salt that we eat? A compound of two substances, either of which alone would destroy us. It is not then to be wondered at, if two seemingly opposed principles are found placed side by side in the Scripture. "Unity in plurality, plurality in unity" is the main principle on which both the world and the Scripture are constructed. It is the purpose of the writer then to exhibit some instances of seemingly contradictory doctrines. The widest and most obvious field of these is found in the range of those schemes of truth which are known respectively as Calvinistic and Arminian.

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility In some passages of Scripture, the change of man from enmity against God to love of Him, is ascribed in the clearest terms to the power of God. It is traced to a purpose of the Sovereign of the Universe formed before creation. In others it is spoken of as the act of the man himself. It is regarded as due to the means made use of. It is enforced on each as his express duty, the neglect or resistance of which will entail his just condemnation.

"Lydia...whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4). But specimens of the other kind frequently occur.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed" (Acts 17:11, 12). "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:38, 40). "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish" (Acts 13:40, 41).

"The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). At times the two come into startling nearness of contact. "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you" (Matt. 11:20-22).

What is more evident, then, than the responsibility of man and that his criminality is in proportion to advantages bestowed! Yet after a similar sentiment concerning Capernaum, what immediately follows? "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:25, 26). Here the sovereignty of God in the election of some and the omission of others, is as clearly asserted.

Nay, the two are closely interwoven in one sentence. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12, 13). The

first effort of Christians has been to reconcile the two statements, that is to bring them into one. Finding that impossible, the great majority have fixed on one class of these texts, rejecting the other. They have made an unscriptural oneness in their own minds by refusing to listen to the opposing truth, or by conforming the passages that speak it into as near an accordance with their views as they can.

Hence have arisen the two great styles of sentiment on these points--one class calling itself Arminian, the other Calvinistic. Much harm has resulted therefrom. The Arminian has fallen into vain self-reliance, bustle, and idolatry of the means. The agency of man, his powers and activity, have come prominently into his view. The glory and praise of man have taken the place of the glory and praise of God. The Calvinistic scheme, taken alone, has fostered an equally harmful effect in the other direction.

Accustomed to regard God only as the Sovereign Benefactor, and man as passive and helpless only, it has fallen into spiritual sloth; and has frowned suspiciously on those who would use means to advance the salvation of men. Extreme Arminianism has made man independent of God, and has denied either His infinite foreknowledge or His boundless power. Extreme Calvinism has so swallowed up the responsibility of man by assertion of his passivity, as to foster inactivity, and to verge on making God the author of sin.

What then is to be done? Which are we to believe of the two statements? It is taken for granted that we are to make our choice between the two; and that, if we cannot reconcile the two systems, we are at liberty to give the preference to which ever we please. This is sheer unbelief. The same God who spake the one spake also the other. Do you ask which you are to believe? Which? Both! It is not necessary to reconcile them before we are bound to receive and act upon the two. It is enough that the Word of God distinctly affirms them both.

The Extent of Redemption Take another point. What is the extent of the redemption procured by the death of the Lord Jesus? The testimony of Scripture on this point is seemingly opposed. Now redemption is affirmed to have been wrought on behalf of the saints and elect, as witness the following passages: "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). "This cup is the new testament (covenant) in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:11, 15).

"Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:10). But again, the death of Jesus is affirmed to have been for the salvation of the world. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).¹ "Prayers" are to be made "for all men." "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have (is willing) all men to be saved."

For the man Christ Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:1, 3-4, 6). Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). What does the apostle mean by "the whole world"? "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). "We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). Again we are brought to the same point.

Here are two seemingly opposing truths. And hence Christians have gone off into opposite directions about them. Time and ingenuity have been wasted in the attempt to compass both into one. They will ever resist the pressure. But are they not contradictory? That cannot be, for they are both parts of the Word of God, and contradictions cannot both be true. Both, then, are to be received whether we can reconcile them or no. Their claim on our reception is not that we can unite them, but that God has testified both.

The Perseverance of the Saints With regard to the perseverance of the saints on their course of holiness, there is the same diversity, or contrast of view. Now the full security of the sheep of Christ is affirmed, in terms the most suited to console them. "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28, 29).

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 38, 39). "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

And yet, how strong and awful the exhortations against falling away! How absolute the terrors threatened in case of so doing. What is the Epistle to the Hebrews, but a long plea against such apostacy? "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?" (Heb. 2:1-3).

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6). "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26, 27).

Justification--by Faith or by Works? Look at the question of justification. On this point almost all true believers agree that a man is justified by faith, without works. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of (in) Jesus Christ unto all (men), and upon all them that believe..." (Rom. 3:20-22).

Yet, on this doctrine, the assertions of Scripture seem opposed. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). But what says James? "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). How then are we to hold in the same heart and understanding, views of truth so contrasted? Very easily. The Bible is the Word of God. Contradictions cannot both be true. Therefore there are no contradictions in the Word of God.

And opposite views of truth arise from different parts of the subject being viewed at different times. God is one, and His Word is one, though its beauty and its glory is that it views truth on all sides. "Look! those two trains will surely dash one another to pieces! With frightful speed they are rushing toward one another! They have passed! Neither touched the other. They move on the same railway, but not on the same line of rail." Are we to believe God when He tells us that His saints are safe in His hand?

Yes, God is infinitely worthy of credit. But He testifies also that it is our solemn duty to watch over ourselves most carefully; and that if anyone apostatize from the truth, recovery is hopeless. This doctrine

comes from the same source; it is then infinitely worthy of credit also. Whether we can see how the two principles harmonize or not, we must receive both and act upon both. We may try to see at what point they run into one, but we are to believe them at once and to act on them at once.

Do we intend to call the Almighty to the bar of our weak and erring intellect, and trust Him only so far as we can see our way alone? So with justification. God, who knows the opposite directions in which the sinful heart of man goes astray, has provided two antagonistic yet harmonizing truths to meet these opposite errors. "Man," says Luther, "is like a drunken peasant; help him up on one side of his horse, and he falls over on the other." Here were Jews, expecting by their works to be justified before the God of strict justice.

Paul pulls down this building, stone from stone. But there are others who seek to make the gospel a plea for license, and while holding the truth in the intellect, to deny it all power in the life. Against these is directed the inspired teaching of James which proves that the faith which will justify before God is a living faith, from which proceed works good before men. Both faith and works are to be found in the Christian; and the Word of God, with bold voice, claims both.

But here Christians generally fail. The Scripture, while it proclaims that everlasting life is a free gift, yet asserts also that believers shall be rewarded for their works and in proportion to them. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Yet again it is written: "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (I Cor. 3:8).

"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6). "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works" (Rev. 2:23). Two hedges define the road; from two abutments springs the bridge. Does the bird fly with one wing? No--with two. Cut off one and it must forever keep to the surface. Thus does God try His people.

Will they trust Him when He affirms that view of truth which runs counter to their temperaments and intellectual bias? or will they trample on one of His sayings in their zeal for the other? The humble, child-like saint will acknowledge and receive both; for his Father, who cannot err, testifies to each alike. The wisdom of God, foreseeing men's passion for oneness, and yet the opposite errors with which different classes are affected, has provided in the unity of His Word the medicines suited for each disorder.

In His Word there are many instances where He recognizes the tendencies of men to deviate in two opposite directions. "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32). The king was to write a copy of the law, "that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left" (Deut. 17:20). But the disobedience of human nature would show itself; and the two opposite tendencies--to add what is human to the Word of God, and to take away from what is God's on the warrant of human wilfulness and pride--were sadly seen in the days of our Lord.

The Pharisees overpowered the Word of the Most High, by adding thereto the traditions of the elders. The Sadducees destroyed its power upon their hearts and lives, by cutting off from it whatever displeased them. For both these deviations the Word of the All-wise was prepared. "Ye shall not add unto the word

which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it" (Deut. 4:2). The same tempers and tendencies of human nature appear in our own day. Rome has smothered the light and warmth of the gospel beneath human commands and traditions.

Rationalism lops off from the tree of God whatever boughs seem to disfigure its unity. With critical shears it clips the hollybush into shape. The Nature of God The same twofoldness of truth appears in the Scripture statements concerning the nature of God. It affirms His unity. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). "God is one" (Gal. 3:20). "It is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith" (Rom. 3:20). But the Scripture as plainly affirms the distinction of persons in the Godhead.

"Unity in plurality and plurality in unity" is the assertion here. This master-truth, which takes its rise in the nature of the Godhead, flows out into all His works. "And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa. 6:8). "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter...even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16). "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1:1, 2).

The Character of God Shall we inquire concerning the character of our God? The same twofoldness of truth meets us. God is strictly just; He is Infinitely merciful. Paul states, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Yet, John says, "God is love" (I John 4:8). The Romanist, speaking wholly of His severity, shuts out His love and grace as a father. The Unitarian, insisting wholly on His paternal character, thrusts out of view His infinite justice and vengeance against sin.

The cross of Christ presents both attributes perfectly distinct, yet gloriously reconciled. The Nature of the Saviour Shall we turn our eyes to the nature of the Saviour? Still the same twofoldness meets us. Is He man? Yes. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). But is He man only? "Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, Is for ever and ever" (Heb. 1:8).

"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). In some passages the two aspects are joined. "Of whom (the Jews) as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 9:5). "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh..." (I Tim. 3:16). But against this twofold truth human unbelief has ever injured itself. One set of heretics denied the manhood of Jesus; one denied the divinity.

The Jewish sect perceived in Him the mere man. The Gentile philosophers, believing that matter was evil, refused to admit that He took a human body. Gentile philosophy in our day denies His divinity. But this glorious truth was foreshadowed of old in the furniture of the tabernacle. The altar of the burnt-offering was composed of wood and brass. The one, able to stand the fire; the other, fuel for it. The altar of incense was framed of wood and gold. The ark of the covenant, by God's direction, consisted of two materials: wood and gold.

One of these was vastly more precious than the other; yet both in union were set in the inner presence-chamber of God. The Status of the Saviour Similarly, His history takes a twofold type. The prophets foretold Him glorified on the earth; reigning at Jerusalem, worshipped by angels, served by kings, adored by the nations. "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord

of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients (elders) gloriously" (Isa. 24:23).

"Every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16). "And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee it shall come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem" (Mic. 4:8; compare Acts 1:6). "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth...Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him" (Psa. 72:8, 11).

On such prophecies the Jewish mind fastened. These it expected to be fulfilled the moment Messiah appeared. Hence, when Jesus appeared in meekness and without regal power, the nation rejected Him. But were these the only passages that spoke of Messiah? No, there were others that, as unequivocally, foretold His humiliation. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 1:6). "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God" (Isa. 49:4).

"Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship" (Isa. 49:7). "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn" (Zech. 12:10). Now, as the Jews could not see how to reconcile both these classes of passages, they took the set which pleased them best, and rejected the opposite series. Hence, with minds blinded by prejudice--a prejudice which refused to receive the entire compass of God's testimony, they understood not the clearest assertions of the Saviour respecting His approaching sufferings.

"Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken" (Luke 18:31-34).

But now the opposite result has taken place. Christians, finding that the promises to Jerusalem, to the Jews, and to Jesus as the King of the Jews, have not yet been accomplished, have decided in their own minds that they are never to be literally fulfilled. But they have decided rather that they belong to some future and indefinite expansion and victory of the Church of Christ. Thus, have they, like the Jews of old, believed only the half of what the prophets have declared, and fall under the lash of the Saviour's rebuke to the two mourning disciples that traveled to Emmaus: "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"

Worship From exactly the same defect of human nature have sprung the many errors of Christians in regard to worship. Jesus commanded immersion of His disciples in the name of the Holy Trinity; the washing of each other's feet; the Supper of the Lord. The Divine Redeemer knew that doctrine could not subsist without rite, and that rite is worthless without doctrine. Hence in His parable of the old and new wine and the old and new wine skins, He showed the necessary connection between rite and doctrine, and the necessity for new rites to embody the new doctrines of the gospel.

But Rome has added to the simplicity of the Saviour's rites a multitude of her own. And, on the other hand, the Quakers cut off rite altogether. So spiritual is the gospel to their eye that it is to have no outward ceremony. Thus the unruly will of man has displayed its willfulness by deviating from God's pathway, both to the right hand and to the left. Means of Edification So again--How is the Church to be built up? How are sinners to be brought in? Some say, By being taught by the preacher's living voice.

Without that, the Bible might be sent to every land, yet scarce a soul be saved. Does not the Holy Spirit say that men will not believe, because they will not hear, unless the feet and voice of some gospel messenger bear them the glad tidings? But the reply of others is opposite, Do you ask, how are we to learn? By Scripture! This alone is infallible truth. Preachers are ever erring; now on this side erroneous or defective, now on that. Would you grow wise? Study the Scriptures.

Does not Jesus call the Jews to the study of the Word of God, that they might learn whether or not His mission were of God? Does not Paul assert that the Scriptures are able to make wise unto salvation? If any then should inquire which of these testimonies we are to receive, the answer is, as before, both! Thrust not out of your understanding or your heart either pillar of the truth. You will not have the whole of God's testimony, unless the two parts become one in your hand.

Let those that will, seek to force asunder distinct truths. Do you retain both? Where did the gospel prosper most? At Berea. And why? Because there both these means were vigorously plied. Apostles preached, and brought before their hearers views quite new and strange. But they affirmed them to be borne out by the law and the Prophets. The Bereans therefore searched to see whether the new tidings were confirmed by the vouchers to which appeal was made. The living Word they found confirmed by the written, and they bowed their souls to the grace of the gospel.

Thus the written Word is the check upon the preacher. It presents either the proof, or the refutation of what he teaches. Without a preacher, the great majority might read their Bibles daily and yet would pass the most important truths unnoticed. And yet, on the other hand, from man's constant tendency to evil, and the teacher's tendency to abuse the truth for his own interests, it is needful that there should be some stronger proof of his doctrine than that the preacher says so, and that he is wiser than the hearer.

Hence the well-instructed Christian turns to his Bible to see whether the doctrines set forth are found in the Book of God. On this point, again, human nature goes off in two opposite directions. Rome shuts up the Word of God from the laity, thus making the people dependent on the authoritative word of the priest. Some, on the other hand, maintain the ability of every believer to discover all truth for themselves from simple perusal of the Word of God. These refuse the office of a teacher.

The Spirit of Worship The Spirit of Worship is another exemplification of the same truth. He who would go before God must approach with the deepest reverence, remembering the Infinite Majesty of Him whom we address. The Christian is a servant (slave). "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28). Yet God loves not the distant spirit of fear by itself; but labours to infuse into the minds of His people love towards Himself as the great peculiarity of the gospel.

The believer is a son. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19, 22). Steadied by these two dissimilar principles, we shall neither worship afar off; nor yet offend, by levity and fulsomeness of words and manner.

The Means of Grace Again, the same truth holds with regard to the means of grace. True religion cannot flourish without public meetings of the saints. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25). Yet again, a religion which consists solely in public meetings is most unhealthy and inoperative upon the temper and demeanor. Man consists of an outward and visible body, and of an inward and invisible soul. So must religion be made up both of rite and of doctrine; both of private prayer and of public meetings for worship and hearing.

The tree consists of two parts--the visible stem, limbs, and leaves; and the unseen roots that keep it firmly in its place. The gate of Truth is one; but its posts are two. Some seem to think that in driving through the entrance, they have only to beware of the right-hand post. They steer so strenuously to the left, that they wreck their vehicle on the opposite side. Others, clearly seeing the left-hand gate-post, shatter themselves as mercilessly on the right. The Church For another example, let's look at the Church.

Sometimes it is presented as a great unity in which every believer in Jesus slain and risen, is a member. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church...Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it...that he might present it to himself a glorious church" (Eph. 5:23, 25, 27). "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). "On this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Sometimes, on the other hand, it is viewed as composed of distinct and separate parts in which there are local offices.

"I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). "I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow soldier, but your messenger (apostle)" (Phil. 2:25). The Saviour addresses each of the seven churches of Asia separately, as under the guidance and control of a separate angel or presiding officer, who is held responsible for the state of the church committed to him. Smyrna is not made responsible for the state of Ephesus; nor Philadelphia for that of Laodicea.

Both then must be held as truths. The Church of Christ is one; the churches of Christ are many. "Unity in plurality, plurality in unity" is the law here also. The Dispensations of God The Dispensations of God offer another example of the same truth. God is unchangeable: yet, it is no less true that He has given, at different times, different views of Himself and has founded thereon different series of commands. These dispensations are to be kept distinct, if we would understand and follow out "the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

But here, as in other cases, the blind, hasty, perverse mind of man has wrought confusion by breaking, in opposite directions, through the hedges which have been set by the Most High, on the right hand and on the left. The ancient and most awful error consisted in setting up the Church of Christ against the Jewish dispensation, and in affirming that commands and principles so different as those embodied by each of these, could not be from the same God. Christianity was from the good God; therefore Judaism was from the evil God, the Creator.

This was the Gnostic view, the theory of the self-confident philosopher of old. That system of blasphemy and error passed away, though it is destined to revive again in our times, and to recall the ancient blasphemies of language and abomination of practice. But when nominal Christianity gained the ascendancy and the favor of emperors, another system arose. The Jewish and the Christian systems were confounded and amalgamated. Christianity became hereditary and national; infant baptism was established; the elders of the Christian church became the sacrificing priests of the Jewish temple; and the

earthly promises to the Jew were claimed as the portion of the church.

This is the fundamental error of Rome. She has made religion a matter of forms and ceremonies, and has brought back to the law of works the professing Christians who trust in her. Rome is Babylon, meaning confusion. In this sad position many, in some cases even servants of Christ, still partially abide. But this error must soon pass away from the minds of the true-hearted in Christ, by the force of the light which the Holy Ghost has lately caused to shine from the pages of His Word on this subject.

The Word of God For some final examples turn to the Word of God. Parts of Holy Scripture are confessedly mysterious and hard to be understood. On these the church of Rome takes her stand; and asks if so dark a book ought to be put into the hands of the ignorant of mankind. She asks triumphantly what the poor man, unfurnished with scholarship, can know of the principles of interpretation. But the answer to her taunts lies in the other aspect of the Word of God. Not all is mysterious; not all requires deep research, knowledge of languages, and the laws of interpretation.

Parts of the Word are simple, and level to the capacity of a child. And while the Holy Spirit confesses some things hard to be understood, which some evil hearts might wrest to their perdition, the Lord Jesus rebuked the Sadducees as erring because they did not know the Scriptures. And the Holy Spirit approves the conduct of the Jewish mother who taught the Holy Scriptures to her son from his childhood. Thus the Scripture is twofold in character, like the God who gave it. Here, His will, which is to guide us, is inscribed in letters which he who runs may read.

There, we stand on a rock above the shoreless, unfathomed ocean of His eternal purposes; and mystery with irremovable, palpable weight oppresses us. We can but cry with one who knew far more than ourselves, "O the depth!" Look at the epistles. Man has an understanding. The epistle enlightens him with instruction; and gives him to apprehend those relations of himself to God and the things unseen which nature could not have discovered. But light in the understanding is not enough.

Man is an active being, an Intelligent and contemplative one. The epistle then is not doctrinal only, but practical also. Here the Word of God is literal; there, figurative. Shall we affirm either principle to the exclusion of the other? God forbid! Mischief lies in pushing either of these principles out of its province. Divines have literalized the application of the law to us. Then come in infant baptism, holy water, sacred garments, sacred places and days, war, oaths. But they have spiritualized the prophets, and thus made the promises to Judah and Jerusalem the heritage of the church; and have made of prophecy a tangled web, which is to speak only the internal experience of each believer.

Reverse this process! The Status of Men Before God Let us, Christian brethren, take the Scripture as a whole. Some value the Scripture as it teaches and embodies the conservative principle, and with bold and steady voice, asserts the diversities of privileges, ranks, and abilities both in the world and in the church. Others can see in it only its threatening denunciations against the iniquities of the ruler and the rich, its principles of advance and of amendment. They grasp with eagerness its assertion of the one origin of man, the equality of the souls of all before the Great Judge, and the responsibility of all alike to Him.

But the Bible holds both these truths. It is the Book of God, and not the book of man. The Most High holds the scales even--now telling us of the sins of kings, and now of the iniquities of the people. Conclusion From this twofoldness of truth designed difficulties arise. Thus does God try mankind. Thus does He try His people. Will they receive both His statements on His simple assertion? Most will not, for they are one-sided. They will force everything to unity. They are impatient at the breaks and "faults" which appear

in the strata of Scripture.

They ignore all evidence that tells against their views. Such must be left. The simple-minded will listen. When it is made a question of fact--"What hath the Lord spoken?"--Christians will be brought nearer together. When we see and testify that God's truth is not to wait for reconciliation to our theories, we shall be far advanced on the road towards unity. What is that mighty power which speeds us so swiftly on our journey by land or sea? It is the product of fire and water.

Remove the fire, or the water, and the engine must remain a lifeless mass. They are natural opposites; yet when brought into contact but kept distinct, what wondrous results follow! Now might not a perfectly true account of a steam-engine be given to savages--a story which to them would seem quite absurd and contradictory? Show them the steam-engine at work! And might not two parties arise among them--the firemen, who attribute all the power to the furnace? and the watermen, who regard all its powers as due to the fluid alone?

Like this seems to be the unreasonableness of Calvinism or Arminianism, where either excludes the other. Preacher! two reins are put into your hand. Do not always pull at one of them, lest you land yourself and your horse in the ditch! The reader then is exhorted to receive what God has asserted, though in seeming inconsistency, concerning His sovereignty and unlimited power on the one hand, and concerning man's freedom and responsibility on the other simply because God has testified it.

This is ground amply sufficient for its reception. It does not need first to be reduced to system and brought under the arrangement of a theory. Yet, in conclusion, the writer desires to offer to the reader's notice a conciliating and apologetic thought or two. The Bible contains the whole truth, the whole counsel of God, His full character. But God's character is twofold. God is the Just Governor, requiring obedience from His subjects. But He is also the merciful Sovereign, dispensing benefits to His creatures.

Viewed in turn from the summits of these two mountainous attributes of God, man takes a twofold character. Do we regard God as the Sovereign Creator whose purposes must stand and whose eternal counsels provided from the beginning for every derangement? O then, man is a thing! a mote of the sunbeam, subjected to undeviating laws! All his goodness must be from the Creator's outflowing. But we may and should regard God as the Ruler of the Universe; the Law-giver, who expects to be obeyed, who promises and who threatens--whose promises are eternal life, whose threats are endless fire and torment.

O then man is a person? a free independent potentate, able to choose as he wills, and to be dealt with justly according to his works. In this view, man is the rebel, breaking God's laws, grieving God's heart, and suffering the penalty of his provocations of the Righteous Governor throughout eternity. Both these views are distinct; both broadly true. Scripture maintains them both. Man is active, as related to the justice of God. Man is passive, as related to the sovereignty of God.

How insuperable, without the gospel view of the cross of Christ, would be the contrary demands of the justice and mercy of God! There, in infinite harmony, appear the perfect justice and the perfect mercy of God. Each of these attributes shall be in as harmonious exercise in the future judgment and award to men as that evidenced in the wondrous event of the cross. But without the revelation of the gospel, man could not have discovered how the antagonistic claims of these two attributes should be met in regard to the sin of men.

It is not astonishing then, if, with regard to the harmonious action of these two attributes, in relation to the conduct and destiny of mankind, we should find difficulty in the attempt to balance and adjust their demands. In attempting it we step out of our province. Here is a chemist making up a prescription. One enters his shop and looks over the paper. He asks him whether the prussic acid can be good when mixed with the quinine. He inquires as to how the chemist can be content to mingle in the same phial the tonic and the antiphlogistic.

What possible good effect can come of the union of ingredients so opposite? Would not the chemist's reply be, "Why, sir, that is not my business. This prescription is made out by one far more skilled in medicine than I am. I am only following orders. The issue of the medicine does not rest with me. My duty is to mix these things together. For that alone I am responsible. For the effects on the sick man, I am not liable to be called in question." Shall that be a sufficient reply for the chemist, because of his inferiority of knowledge to the physician?

And shall it not be ample justification for the servant of God, who in preaching and teaching combines truths seemingly opposite, on the authority of the all-wise Physician of souls? Yes! Chemist of the divine dispensary! Make up the prescription as ordered! Leave the result to Him who wrote the recipe! The Scripture is a house with more than one front. He who will always approach it by the eastern path, may assert that its color is black. He who never will enter it by any but the western road, may affirm, with equal resoluteness and with equal truth, that its color is white.

But he who will tread both paths, and go round the house, viewing it in its every aspect, may see how the black wall and the white, the front, the back and the gables, make up one consolidated edifice, deep rooted in the nature of both God and man. He who will receive but half the truth is ever liable to revulsions--and these are the more vehement, the more unmingled and one-sided they are. The vehement Arminian, who, by some potent antagonist, or by the force of truth, is convinced of the sovereignty of God, not unfrequently passes into the hard and rigid Calvinist; and he who begins by making too much of good works, may end by denouncing and reprobating them. The Lord give us a single eye, and the teaching of His Holy Spirit that each part of His Word may leave its due impression on our judgments, our hearts, and our conduct!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/robert-govett/the-twofoldness-of-divine-truth/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net