



## The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth

### Chapter 5: Holy Scripture and Modern Negations

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Is there today in the midst of criticism and unsettlement a tenable doctrine of Holy Scripture for the Christian Church and for the world; and if there is, what is that doctrine? That is unquestionably a very pressing question at the present time. "Is there a book which we can regard as the repository of a true revelation of God and an infallible guide in the way of life, and as to our duties to God and man?" is a question of immense importance to us all. Fifty years ago, perhaps less than that, the question hardly needed to be asked among Christian people. It was universally conceded, taken for granted, that there is such a book, the book which we call the Bible. Here, it was believed, is a volume which is an inspired record of the whole will of God for man's salvation; accept as true and inspired the teaching of that book, follow its guidance, and you cannot stumble, you cannot err in attaining the supreme end of existence, in finding salvation, in grasping the prize of a glorious immortality.

Now, a change has come. There is no disguising the fact that we live in an age when, even within the Church, there is much uneasy and distrustful feeling about the Holy Scriptures — a hesitancy to lean upon them as an authority and to use them as the weapons of precision they once were; with a corresponding anxiety to find some surer basis in external Church authority, or with others, in Christ Himself, or again in a Christian consciousness, as it is named, — a surer basis for Christian belief and life.

We often hear in these days reference to the substitution, in Protestantism, of an "INFALLIBLE BIBLE FOR AN INFALLIBLE CHURCH", and the implication is that the one idea is just as baseless as the other. Sometimes the idea is taken up, quite commonly perhaps, that the thought of an authority external to ourselves — to our own reason or conscience or spiritual nature — must be wholly given up; that only that can be accepted which carries its authority within itself by the appeal it makes to reason or to our spiritual being, and therein lies the judge for us of what is true and what is false.

That proposition has an element of truth in it; it may be true or may be false according as we interpret it. However, as it is frequently interpreted it leaves the Scriptures, but more than that, it leaves Jesus Christ Himself without any authority for us save that with which our own minds see fit to clothe Him. But in regard to the **INFALLIBLE BIBLE AND THE INFALLIBLE CHURCH**, it is proper to point out that there is a considerable difference between these two things — between the idea of an authoritative Scripture and the idea of an infallible Church or an infallible Pope, in the Roman sense of that word. It may be a clever antithesis to say that Protestantism substituted the idea of an infallible Book for the older Romish dogma of an infallible Church; but the antithesis, the contrast, unfortunately has one fatal inaccuracy about it. The idea of the authority of Scripture is not younger, but older than Romanism. It is not a late invention of Protestantism. It is not something that Protestants invented and substituted for the Roman conception of the infallible Church; but it is the original conception that lies in the Scriptures themselves. There is a great difference there. It is a belief — this belief in the Holy Scripture — which was accepted and acted upon by the Church of Christ from the first. The Bible itself claims to be an authoritative Book, and an infallible guide to the true knowledge of God and of the way of salvation. This view is implied in every reference made to it, so far as it then existed, by Christ and His Apostles. That the New Testament, the work of the Apostles and of apostolic men, does not stand on a lower level of inspiration and authority than the Old Testament, is, I think, hardly worth arguing. And in that sense, as a body of writings of Divine authority, the books of the Old and the New Testament were accepted by the Apostles and by the Church of the post-apostolic age.

Take the writings of any of the early Church fathers — I have waded through them wearily as teacher of Church History — take Tertullian or Origen, or others, and you will find their words saturated with references to Scripture. You will find the Scriptures treated in precisely the same way as they are used in the Biblical literature of today; namely, as the ultimate authority on the matters of which they speak. I really do the fathers an injustice in this comparison, for I find things said and written about the Holy Scriptures by teachers of the Church today which those early fathers would never have permitted themselves to utter. It has now become fashionable among a class of religious teachers to speak disparagingly of or belittle the Holy Scriptures as an authoritative rule of faith for the Church.

The leading cause of this has undoubtedly been the trend which the criticism of the Holy Scriptures has assumed during the last half century or more.

By all means, let criticism have its rights. Let purely literary questions about the Bible receive full and fair discussion. Let the structure of books be impartially examined. If a reverent science has light to throw on the composition or authority or age of these books, let its voice be heard. If this thing is of God we cannot overthrow it; if it be of man, or so far as it is of man, or so far as it comes in conflict with the reality of things in the Bible, it will come to naught — as in my opinion a great deal of it is fast coming today through its own excesses. No fright, therefore, need be taken at the mere word, “Criticism.” On the other hand, we are not bound to accept every wild critical theory that any critic may choose to put forward and assert, as the final word on this matter. We are entitled, nay, we are bound, to look at the presuppositions on which each, criticism proceeds, and to ask, How far is the criticism controlled by those presuppositions?

We are bound to look at the evidence by which the theory is supported, and to ask, Is it really borne out by that evidence? And when theories are put forward with every confidence as fixed results, and we find them, as we observe them, still in constant process of evolution and change, constantly becoming more complicated, more extreme, more fanciful, we are entitled to inquire. Is this the certainty that it was alleged to be? Now that is my complaint against much of the current criticism of the Bible, not that it is criticism, but that it starts from the wrong basis, that it proceeds by arbitrary methods, and that it arrives at results which I think are demonstrably false results. That is a great deal to say, no doubt, but perhaps I shall have some justification to offer for it before I am done.

I am not going to enter into any general tirade against criticism; but it is useless to deny that a great deal of what is called criticism is responsible for the uncertainty and unsettlement of feeling existing at the present time about the Holy Scriptures. I do not speak especially of those whose philosophical standpoint compels them to take up an attitude of negation to supernatural revelation, or to books which profess to convey such a revelation. Criticism of this kind, criticism that starts from the basis of the denial of the supernatural, has of course, to be reckoned with. In its hands everything is engineered from that basis. There is the denial to

begin with, that God ever has entered into human history, in word and deed, in any supernatural way. The necessary result is that whatever in the Bible affirms or flows from such interposition of God is expounded or explained away.

The Scriptures on this showing, instead of being, the living oracles of God, become simply the fragmentary remains of an ancient Hebrew literature, the chief value of which would seem to be the employment it affords to the critic to dissect it into its various parts, to overthrow the tradition of the past in regard to it, and to frame ever new, ever changing, ever more wonderful theories of the origin of the books and the so-called legends they contain. Leaving, however, such futile, rationalistic criticism out of account — because that is not the kind of criticism with which we as Christian people have chiefly to deal in our own circles — there is certainly an immense change of attitude on the part of many who still sincerely hold faith in the supernatural revelation of God. I find it difficult to describe this tendency, for I am desirous not to describe it in any way which would do injustice to any Christian thinker, and it is attended by so many signs of an ambiguous character. Jesus is recognized by the majority of those who represent it as “the Incarnate Son of God,” though with shadings off into more or less indefinite assertions even on that fundamental article, which make it sometimes doubtful where the writers exactly stand. The process of thought in regard to Scripture is easily traced. First, there is an ostentatious throwing overboard, joined with some expression of contempt, of what is called the verbal inspiration of Scripture — a very much abused term. Jesus is still spoken of as the highest revealer, and it is allowed that His words, if only we could get at them — and on the whole it is thought we can — furnish the highest rule of guidance for time and for eternity. But even criticism, we are told, must have its rights. Even in the New Testament the Gospels go into the crucible, and in the name of synoptical criticism, historical criticism; they are subject to wonderful processes, in the course of which much of the history gets melted out or is peeled off as Christian characteristics. Jesus, we are reminded, was still a man of His generation, liable to error in His human knowledge, and allowance must be made for the limitations in His conceptions and judgments. Paul is alleged to be still largely dominated by his inheritance of Rabbinical and Pharisaic ideas. He had been brought up a Pharisee, brought up with the rabbis, and when he became a Christian, he carried a great deal of that into his Christian thought, and we have to strip off that thought when we come to the study of his

Epistles. He is therefore a teacher not to be followed further than our own judgment of Christian truth leads us. That gets rid of a great deal that is inconvenient about Paul's teaching.

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE CRITICS**

If these things are done in the "green tree" of the New Testament, it is easy to see what will be done in the "dry tree" of the Old. The conclusions of the more advanced school of critics are here generally accepted as once for all settled, with the result — in my judgment, at any rate — that the Old Testament is immeasurably lowered from the place it once held in our reverence. Its earlier history, down to about the age of the kings, is largely resolved into myths and legends and fictions. It is ruled out of the category of history proper. No doubt we are told that the legends are just as good as the history, and perhaps a little better, and that the ideas which they convey to us are just as good, coming in the form of legends, as if they came in the form of fact.

But behold, its laws, when we come to deal with them in this manner, lack Divine authority. They are the products of human minds at various ages.

Its prophecies are the utterances of men who possessed indeed the Spirit of God, which is only in fuller degree what other good men, religious teachers in all countries, have possessed — not a spirit qualifying, for example, to give real predictions, or to bear authoritative messages of the truth to men. And so, in this whirl and confusion of theories — you will find them in our magazines, you will find them in our encyclopedias, you will find them in our reviews, you will find them in many books which have appeared to annihilate the conservative believers — in this whirl and confusion of theories, is it any wonder that many should be disquieted and unsettled, and feel as if the ground on which they have been wont to rest was giving way beneath their feet? And so the question comes back with fresh urgency. What is to be said of the place and value of Holy Scripture?

### **IS THERE A TENABLE DOCTRINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF TODAY?**

One of the urgent needs of our time, and a prime need of the Church, is just a replacement of Holy Scripture, with due regard, I grant, to any really ascertained facts in regard to its literary history, in the faith and lives

of men, as the truly inspired and divinely sealed record of God's revealed will for men in great things of the soul. But then, is such a position tenable? In the fierce light of criticism that beats upon the documents and upon the revelation of God's grace they profess to contain, can this position be maintained? I venture to think, indeed, I am very sure, it can. Let me try to indicate — for I can do hardly any more — the lines along which I would answer the question, Have we or can we have a tenable doctrine of Holy Scripture?

For a satisfactory doctrine of Holy Scripture — and by that I mean a doctrine which is satisfactory for the needs of the Christian Church, a doctrine which answers to the claim the Scripture makes for itself, to the place it holds in Christian life and Christian experience, to the needs of the Christian Church for edification and evangelization, and in other ways — I say, for a satisfactory doctrine of Holy Scripture it seems to me that three things are indispensably necessary. There is necessary, first, a more positive view of the structure of the Bible than at present obtains in many circles. There is necessary, second, the acknowledgment of a true supernatural revelation of God in the history and religion of the Bible. There is necessary, third, the recognition of a true supernatural inspiration in the record of that revelation. These three things, to my mind, go together — a more positive view of the structure of the Bible; the recognition of the supernatural revelation embodied in the Bible; and a recognition in accordance with the Bible's own claim of a supernatural inspiration in the record of the Bible. Can we affirm these three things? Will they bear the test? I think they will.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE**

First as to the structure of the Bible, there is needed a more positive idea of that structure than is at present prevalent. You take much of the criticism and you find the Bible being disintegrated in many ways, and everything like structure falling away from it. You are told, for example, that these books — say the Books of Moses are made up of many documents, which are very late in origin and cannot claim historical value. You are told that the laws they contain are also, for the most part, of tolerably late origin, and the Levitical laws especially are of post-exilian construction; they were not given by Moses; they were unknown when the Children of Israel were carried into captivity. Their temple usage perhaps is embodied in the Levitical law, but most of the contents of that Levitical law were wholly unknown. They were the construction — the invention,

to use a term lately employed of priests and scribes in the post-exilian period. They were put into shape, brought before the Jewish community returned from Babylon, and accepted by it as the law of life. Thus you have the history of the Bible turned pretty much upside down, and things take on a new aspect altogether.

Must I then, in deference to criticism, accept these theories, and give up the structure which the Bible presents? Taking the Bible as it stands, I find and you will find if you look there also, without any particular critical learning you will find it — what seems to be evidence of a very definite internal structure, part fitting into part and leading on to part, making up a unity of the whole in that Bible. The Bible has undeniably a structure as it stands. It is distinguished from all other books of the kind, from all sacred books in the world, from Koran and Buddhist scriptures and Indian scriptures and every other kind of religious books. It is distinguished just by this fact, that it is the embodiment of a great plan or scheme or purpose of Divine grace extending from the beginning of time through successive ages and dispensations down to its culmination in Jesus Christ and the Pentecostal outpourings of the Spirit. The history of the Bible is the history of that development of God's redemptive purpose. The promises of the Bible mark the stages of its progress and its hope. The covenants of the Bible stand before us in the order of its unfolding. You begin with Genesis. Genesis lays the foundation and leads up to the Book of Exodus; and the Book of Exodus, with its introduction of the law-giving, leads up to what follows. Deuteronomy looks back upon the history of the rebellions and the laws given to the people, and leads up to the conquest. I need not follow the later developments, coming away down through the monarchy and the prophecy and the rest, but you find it all gathered up and fulfilled in the New Testament. The Bible, as we have it, closes in Gospel and Epistle and Apocalypse, fulfilling all the ideas of the Old Testament. There the circle completes itself with the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Here is a structure; here is the fact; here is a structure, a connected story, a unity of purpose extending through this Book and binding all its parts together. Is that structure an illusion? Do we only, and many with us, dream that it is there? Do our eyes deceive us when we think we see it? Or has somebody of a later date invented it, and put it all, inwrought it all, in these earlier records, legends and stories, or whatever you like to call it — skillfully woven into the story until it presents there the appearance of naturalness and truth? I would like to find the mind capable of inventing it, and then

the mind capable of putting it in and working it into a history once they got the idea itself. But if not invented, it belongs to the reality and the substance of the history; it belongs to the facts; and therefore to the Book that records the facts. And there are internal attestations in that structure of the Bible to the genuineness of its contents that protest against the efforts that are so often made to reduce it to fragments and shiver up that unity and turn it upside down. "Walk about Zion ... tell the towers thereof; mark ye well her bulwarks;" you will find there's something there which the art of man will not avail to overthrow.

"Now, that is all very well," I hear some one say, "but there are facts on the other side; there are those manifold proofs which our critical friends adduce that the Bible is really a collection of fragments and documents of much later date, and that the history is really quite a different thing from what the Bible represents it to be." Well, are we to sit down and accept their dictum on that subject without evidence? When I turn to the evidence I do not find them to have that convincing power which our critical friends assign to them. I am not rejecting this kind of critical theory because it goes against my prejudices or traditions; I reject it simply because it seems to me the evidence does not sustain it, and that the stronger evidence is against it. I cannot go into details; but take just the one point that I have mentioned — this post-exilian origin of the Levitical law. I have stated what is said about that matter — that those laws and institutions that you find in the middle of the Books of the Pentateuch — those laws and institutions about priests and Levites and sacrifices and all that — had really no existence, had no authoritative form, and to a large extent had not existence of any kind until after the Jews returned from Babylon, and then they were given out as a code of laws which the Jews accepted. That is the theory which is stated once and again. But let the reader put himself in the position of that returned community, and see what the thing means. These exiles had returned from Babylon. They had been organized into a new community. They had rebuilt their Temple, and then long years after that, when things had got into confusion, those two great men, Ezra and Nehemiah, came among them, and by and by Ezra produced and publicly proclaimed this law of Moses — what he called the law of Moses, the law of God by the hand of Moses — which he had brought from Babylon. A full description of what happened is given in the eighth chapter of the Book of Nehemiah.

Ezra reads that law from his pulpit of wood day after day to the people, and the interpreter gives the sense. Now, mind you, most of the things in this law, in this book that he is reading to the people, had never been heard of before — never had existed, in fact; priests and Levites such as are there described had never existed. The law itself was long and complicated and burdensome, but the marvelous thing is that the people meekly accept it all as true — meekly accept it as law, at any rate — and submit to it, and take upon themselves its burdens without a murmur of dissent. That is a very remarkable thing to start with. But remember, further, what that community was. It was not a community with oneness of mind, but it was a community keenly divided in itself. If you read the narrative you will find that there were strong opposing factions in that community; there were parties strongly opposed to Ezra and Nehemiah and their reforms; there were many, as you see in the Book of Malachi, who were religiously faithless in that community. But marvelous to say, they all join in accepting this new and burdensome and hitherto unheard of law as the law of Moses, the law coming down to them from hoary antiquity. There were priests and Levites in that community who knew something about their own origin; they had genealogies and knew something about their own past. According to the new theory, these Levites were quite a new order; they had never existed at all before the time of the exile, and they had come into existence through the sentence of degradation that the prophet Ezekiel had passed upon them in the 44th chapter of his book. History is quite silent about this degradation. If anyone asks who carried out the degradation, or why was it carried out, or when was it done, and how came the priests to submit to the degradation, there is no answer to be given at all. But it came about somehow, so we are told.

And so these priests and Levites are there, and they stand and listen without astonishment as they learn from Ezra how the Levites had been set apart long centuries before in the wilderness by the hand of God, and had an ample tithe provision made for their support, and cities, and what not, set apart for them to live in. People know a little about their past. These cities never had existed except on paper; but they took it all in. They are told about these cities, which they must have known had never existed as Levitical cities. They not only hear but they accept the heavy tithe Burdens without a word of remonstrance, and they make a covenant with God pledging themselves to faithful obedience to all those commands. Those tithes laws, as we discover, had no actual relation to

their situation at all. They were drawn up for a totally different case. They were drawn up for a state of things in which there were few priests and many Levites. The priests were only to get the tithe of a tenth, But in this restored community there were a great many priests and few Levites. The tithe laws did not apply at all, but they accepted these as laws of Moses.

And so I might go over the provisions of the law one by one — tabernacle and priests and ritual and sacrifices and Day of Atonement — these things, in their post-exilian form, had never existed; they were spun out of the inventive brains of scribes; and yet the people accepted them all as the genuine handiwork of the ancient law-giver. Was ever such a thing heard of before? Try it in any city. Try to get the people to take upon themselves a series of heavy burdens of taxation or tithes or whatever you like, on the ground that it had been handed down from the middle ages to the present time. Try to get them to believe it; try to get them to obey it, and you will find the difficulty. Is it credible to anyone who leaves books and theories in the study and takes a broad view of human nature with open eyes? I aver that for me, at any rate, it is not; and it will be a marvel to me as long as I am spared to live, how such a theory has ever gained the acceptance it has done among unquestionably able and sound-minded men. I am convinced that the structure of the Bible vindicates itself, and that these counter theories break down.

### **A SUPERNATURAL REVELATION**

I think it is an essential element in a tenable doctrine of Scripture, in fact the core of the matter, that it contains a record of a true supernatural revelation; and that is what the Bible claims to be not a development of man's thoughts about God, and not what this man and that one came to think about God, how they came to have the ideas of a Jehovah or Yahveh, who was originally the storm-god of Sinai, and how they manufactured out of this the great universal God of the prophets — but a supernatural revelation of what God revealed Himself in word and deed to men in history. And if that claim to a supernatural revelation from God falls, the Bible falls, because it is bound up with it from beginning to end. Now, it is just here that a great deal of our modern thought parts company with the Bible. I am quite well aware that many of our friends who accept these newer critical theories, claim to be just as firm believers in Divine revelation as I am myself, and in Jesus Christ and all that concerns Him. I rejoice in the fact, and I believe that they are warranted

in saying that there is that in the religion of Israel which you cannot expunge, or explain on any other hypothesis but Divine revelation.

But what I maintain is that this theory of the religion of the Bible which has been evolved, which has peculiarly come to be known as the critical view, had a very different origin in men who did not believe in the supernatural revelation of God in the Bible. This school as a whole, as a wide-spread school, holds the fundamental position — the position which its adherents call that of the modern mind that miracles did not happen and cannot happen. It takes the ground that they are impossible; therefore its followers have to rule everything of that kind out of the Bible record. I have never been able to see how that position is tenable to a believer in a living personal God who really loves His creatures and has a sincere desire to bless them. Who dare to venture to assert that the power and will of such a Being as we must believe God to be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — is exhausted in the natural creation? That there are no higher things to be attained in God's providence than can be attained through the medium of natural law? That there is in such a Being no capability of revealing Himself in words and deeds beyond nature? If there is a dogmatism in the world, it is that of the man who claims to limit the Author of the universe by this finite bound. We are told sometimes that it is a far higher thing to see God in the natural than to see Him in something that transcends the natural; a far higher thing to see God in the orderly regular working of nature than to suppose that there has ever been anything transcending that ordinary natural working. I think we all do see God, and try to see Him more and more, in the ordinary and regular working of nature. I hope all try every day to see God there. But the question is, Has this natural working not its limits? Is there not something that nature and natural workings cannot reach, cannot do for men, that we need to have done for us? And are we so to bind God that He cannot enter into communion with man in a supernatural economy of grace, an economy of revelation, an economy of salvation? Are we to deny that He has done so? That is really the dividing line both in Old Testament and New between the different theories. Revelation, surely, all must admit if man is to attain the clear knowledge of God that is needed; and the question is one of fact, Has God so revealed Himself? And I believe that it is an essential part of the answer, the true doctrine of Scripture, to say, "Yes, God has so revealed Himself, and the Bible is the record of that revelation, and that revelation shines in its light from the beginning to the end of it." And unless there is a whole-hearted

acceptance of the fact that God has entered, in word and deed, into human history for man's salvation, for man's renovation, for the deliverance of this world, a revelation culminating in the great Revealer Himself — unless we accept that, we do not get the foundation for the true doctrine of Holy Scripture.

### THE INSPIRED BOOK

Now, just a word in closing, on Inspiration. I do not think that anyone will weigh the evidence of the Bible itself very carefully without saying that at least it claims to be in a peculiar and especial manner an inspired book. There is hardly anyone, I think, who will doubt that Jesus Christ treats the Old Testament in that way. Christ treats it as an imperfect stage of revelation, no doubt. Christ, as the Son of Man, takes up a lordly, discretionary attitude towards that revelation, and He supersedes very much what is in, it by something higher, but Christ recognizes that there was true Divine revelation there, that He was the goal of it all; He came to fulfill the law and the prophets. The Scriptures are the last word with Him — "Have ye not read? "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures." And it is just as certain that the Apostles treated the Old Testament in that way, and that they claimed in a peculiar sense the Spirit of God themselves. They claimed that in them and in their word was laid "the foundation on which the Church was built," Jesus Christ Himself, as the substance of their testimony, being the chief corner-stone; "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets." And if you say, "Well, are these New Testament Apostles and Prophets?" That is in Ephesians, 2nd chapter. You go to the fifth verse of the third chapter and you find this mystery of Christ which God had revealed to His holy Apostles and Prophets by His Spirit; and it is on that the Church was built. And when you come to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:14-17) to that classical passage, you find the marks there by which inspired Scripture is distinguished.

Take the book of Scripture and ask just this question: Does it answer to the claim of this inspired volume? How are we to test this? I do not enter here into the question that has divided good men as to theories of inspiration — questions about inerrancy in detail, and other matters. I want to get away from these things at the circumference to the center. But take the broader test.

## THE BIBLE'S OWN TEST OF INSPIRATION

What does the Bible itself give us as the test of its inspiration? What does the Bible itself name as the qualities that inspiration imparts to it? Paul speaks in Timothy of the Sacred Writings that were able to make wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. He goes on to tell us that ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, in order that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

When you go back to the Old Testament and its praise of the Word of God you will find the qualities of inspiration are just the same. "The law of the Lord is perfect", etc. Those are the qualities which the inspired Book is alleged to sustain — qualities which only a true inspiration of God's Spirit could give; qualities beyond which we surely do not need anything more.

Does anyone doubt that the Bible possesses these qualities? Look at its structure; look at its completeness; look at it in the clearness and fullness and holiness of its teachings; look at it in its sufficiency to guide every soul that truly seeks light unto the saving knowledge of God. Take the Book as a whole, in its whole purpose, its whole spirit, its whole aim and tendency, and the whole setting of it, and ask, Is there not manifest the power which you can only trace back, as it traces back itself, to God's Holy Spirit really in the men who wrote it?

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