

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE And WHY WE BELIEVE IT IS GOD'S WORD

by

W. H. Griffith Thomas

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CHAPTER SIX

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE primary question concerning the New Testament, the one on which all else rests, must never be forgotten. It is the same one that has already been faced in relation to the Old Testament; viz., its historical trustworthiness. Is it an accurate presentation? This must and can be tested at every point, and the following constitute the main avenues of approach.

1. The Gospels - The record is specially noteworthy on account of something that is apt to be overlooked. It is well known that in the entire realm of literature there is no trace of the picture of a perfect character. Poets, novelists, dramatists, philosophers, essayists, have given the world wonderful creations and yet no writer has ever attempted to portray: a perfect man or woman.

Professor Mackintosh has said that Tennyson's King Arthur is one of the most recent failures in this respect. And yet in the Gospels, written by ordinary men, not literary geniuses, we have a perfect character depicted. How did the Evangelists accomplish what no writer has ever attempted with success?

As Fairbairn asked, did the record invent the Person or did the Person create the record?

It has often been pointed out that if the four Evangelists invented the character of JESUS CHRIST we are faced with a literary miracle of the first magnitude. There is only one explanation of the literary features of the Gospels; their presentation of CHRIST is true.

The same result is seen by a consideration of his character in detail. What are we to say of the unique feature of CHRIST's sinlessness?

How is it that only one man has been found out of all the millions of the world's history in whom the entail of sin has been broken? Then, too, what is to be said about the marvelous combination and equally wonderful balance of qualities found in JESUS which are seldom found in their blend and never found in their balance in anyone else?

No wonder that Bushnell should say that "the character of JESUS CHRIST forbids His possible classification with men."

The claim of CHRIST as recorded in the Gospels is another point of great importance.

- He claimed to be perfect (John 8:46);
- He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah (Matthew 26:64);
- He claimed to be the Master of mankind (Matthew 4:19);
- He claimed to be the Judge of the world (Matthew 25:32);
- He claimed to exercise the prerogatives of GOD (Matthew 28:20; Mark 2:10; John 9:38).

How are these claims to be explained?

Rabbi Duncan said the last word when he put it thus: "CHRIST either deceived mankind by conscious fraud; or was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine."

Taking the record of the life of JESUS in the Gospels, no one can seriously doubt the consistency of the picture and the persistence of it in spite of all the acute criticisms of the last eighty years.

2. The Book of Acts - This record of the first thirty years of the history of the Christian community has been the subject of much and thorough examination of late years, and, as is well known, the great scholarship of Sir William Ramsay has endorsed its accuracy in the light of archeological research in Asia Minor and elsewhere.

In addition to its representations of the primitive Christian society, the book comes into contact at several points with the secular history of Palestine, Greece and Rome, and the result of testing it confirms our conviction that Luke was a first-rate historian and can be relied on for accuracy.

3. The Christian Church - The New Testament gives the record of the commencement of the society which we call the Church.

A few people believed that their Master was alive, and formed themselves in a society based on this conviction. Then they set out to proclaim this as a message; and wherever they went the same result followed, societies sprang up believing JESUS CHRIST was alive.

But this often meant opposition, stern and persistent; it almost always involved persecution, cruel and relentless; it frequently led to death.

But, in spite of all, the Church continued, increased, and extended far and wide.

No temporal advantage led men to join it; no human force compelled them to become associated with it.

The Church everywhere consisted of free, loyal, devoted adherents whose relation to CHRIST impelled them to continue their testimony of word and deed to the Master whom they trusted and loved.

This is the society of which the start and early years found their record in the New Testament. And is it not instinct with reality!

4. The Apostle Paul - The character and career of Paul afford a special opportunity of testing the trustworthiness of the New Testament.

As a man he was of outstanding force, a man of great intellectual ability, of intense feeling, of keen conscientiousness, and of strong, determined will. When mind, emotion, conscience and will combine, as they did in Saul of Tarsus, we have a real man, one in the very front rank.

Now it was this able man that became a persecutor of Christians and, using his own language, was "**exceedingly mad against them.**"

He went into houses, dragged out men and women, put them into prison, simply because they were Christians. Then, when he went to Damascus, a hundred and fifty miles away, to continue the work, something happened, and the persecutor became a preacher of the very faith he had formerly attempted to destroy. Not only so, but he continued in the same course for thirty years amid opposition, persecutions, perils, and disappointments.

How are we to account for Saul's conversion and Paul's apostleship?

Baur examined this problem sixty years ago, and confessed it was insoluble. So with every theory since then; they have been shattered on the simple rock of Paul's historical testimony, "**It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.**" And what is this but a striking proof of the trustworthiness of the New Testament.

5. The Agreement with the Old Testament - We hardly realize that the New Testament is not a book, but twenty-seven books, and the remarkable feature is that these twenty-seven books proceeding from eight authors are in absolute unity with the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

That book is one of:

- (1) Prophecies largely unfulfilled;
- (2) Ceremonies mainly unexplained;
- (3) Aspirations mostly unsatisfied.

But the New Testament meets these three features of incompleteness with its three lines of teaching.

- (1) The Prophecies are fulfilled in JESUS the Prophet.
- (2) The Ceremonies are explained in JESUS CHRIST the Sacrifice and Priest.
- (3) The Aspirations are satisfied in JESUS CHRIST the Lord - " JESUS my Prophet, Priest, and King."

Could the agreement have been due to the collusion of all the eight writers of the New Testament? Impossible.

As the great Methodist theologian, Dr. W. B. Pope, well said:

"That the New Testament as fulfilment should so perfectly correspond with the Old Testament as prophecy is in itself the most wonderful phenomenon in literature: it is evidence as near demonstration as needs be of the intervention of a divine Hand. The Redeemer made manifest in the later Scripture answers face to face, and feature for feature, to the Form predicted in the older Scripture. One idea runs through the whole: the kingdom of GOD set up or restored in His Incarnate Son."

6. The Unique Claim - For the first two or three hundred years Christianity suffered persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire.

This was because it claimed to dispossess every other religious system and to be the only religion in the world. If the Christian people had gone to the Emperor and others in authority and said, "This is a new religion; we want you to allow it to come with the others and be put in your Pantheon," they would have been ready to allow Christianity to appear as one of the number. But that was not the way of the Gospel.

It said, in effect, "No, this is the only religion. The others are not religions."

Persecution then came upon Christianity, because it was intolerant - in the right sense of the word, the only way in which anyone has a right to be intolerant, with the intolerance of truth.

Another point of great importance is included in this claim.

The Bible has now been before the world for nearly two thousand years in its complete form, and yet it has said the last word on the greatest things in life.

We find in it:

- the last word about GOD,
- the last word about salvation from sin,
- the last word about holiness,
- the last word about the future life.

And as has often been pointed out, while we outgrow the teaching of other men, we never outgrow the teaching of JESUS CHRIST and his apostles.

Not only so, we have had great systems of philosophy and morality during the last thousand or fifteen hundred years, great theories, great books, and great ideas: but there is not a single new moral fact, not a single new ethical truth, in anyone of these great systems that we cannot find in this Book. How is it that with all the great teachers of these centuries nothing new and true has been propounded beyond what is found in this Book?

Surely the claim of CHRIST and his apostles to finality is true.

- **"No man cometh unto the Father but by me"** (John 14:6).
- "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

And these claims support the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament.

7. The Spiritual Power - For most Christian people the simplest and most conclusive proof of the Bible will be that which is derived from their own use of Holy Scripture in daily life and work. First and foremost, Scripture is a spiritual book brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit, and it is just here that criticism fails us.

A learned writer justly says:

"I am struck with the absence of any sign of an experience distinctively Christian in many of those who discuss the sanctuaries of the Christian faith . . . Some of these scholars, to judge from their writings alone, do not seem even so much as to have heard of a Holy Ghost. And they have a fatal dread of pietism, and Methodism, and most forms of intensely personal evangelical faith. They are, like Haeckel, in their own way the victims of an intellectualism which means spiritual atrophy to Christianity at last.

"In matters of the soul it is better to have the dogma of the telescope than that of the microscope. It is better to have the dogma of Melancthon, or even Calvin, than of Wellhausen or Schmiedel (whom I name with due respect for the great work they represent). The one has the positivity of infinite revelation, the other the positivism of the present age."

Taking these seven considerations together, can there be any real doubt or serious question about the historical accuracy and therefore trustworthiness of the New Testament?

And if we proceed to enquire as to the cause of this reliability, there is only one explanation:

The New Testament is a supernatural book.

QUESTIONS

1. What one feature makes the Gospels noteworthy? In this respect how do they compare with literature generally?
2. What explanation of the literary features of the Gospels is alone possible? State Principal Fairbairn's dictum on this question.
3. How is this seen to be true when CHRIST's character is studied in detail? How did Rabbi Duncan sum up the possibilities concerning CHRIST?
4. What has been the result of the examination into the accuracy of the Book of the Acts? Whose work is largely responsible for this result?
5. In what way does the Christian Church establish the accuracy of the New Testament? Who is the most outstanding man in the New Testament?
6. How do his life and experience give a special opportunity for testing its trustworthiness?
7. What is the New Testament! Is it in harmony with the Old Testament? What very largely is the character of the Old Testament? How is this met in the New Testament?
8. What is the nature of Christianity's claim? What was the attitude of the Roman Empire toward Christianity as a consequence of this claim?
9. What is the character of the pronouncements of the Bible, touching GOD, man, salvation, and other subjects?
10. What will most people regard as the simplest and most conclusive proof of the trustworthiness of the Bible?

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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