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→ SERMONS ←

SERVICE THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH.

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He gave some apostles; and some prophets and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.—EPHESIANS iv., 11, 12.

IT is a prevalent idea that a Church is a religious community whose chief end is the enjoyment of privilege; that each member is only as a child in a nursery, or a sick man in a hospital, whom those in official position are to care for and nurse, and is very ill-used when he fails to receive such compassionate ministries. Now, a half-truth is a heresy; and more than any which councils have condemned this has restrained Christian enterprise, and held men aloof from those works which were tasking the faith and devotion of others, and which need the conjoined efforts of all to carry on and complete. Means of grace are contemplated as ends. Christian fellowship is maintained for mere personal benefit. The Church is a coterie of privileged people, separated from others, and provided with moral and spiritual advantages which belong only to "the elect." And though this false, this ignoble idea of her office and privilege is giving way in this age, yet it has so dominated the life of the Church in the past that she has lingered in drowsy surfeit about her table whilst multitudes with pangs of hunger have vainly waited outside her door for the mere fragments of her feast. A different idea is presented in the text. It is clouded, however, by a wrong punctuation: and if a single comma

be selfish and unmindful of the wretchedness of the poor; and not less so are they a warning to the Churches not to forget the words of the Master—"freely ye have received, freely give."

THE BIBLE ITS OWN WITNESS.

BY PROFESSOR R. L. DARNEY, D.D. (PRESBYTERIAN), AUSTIN, TEXAS.

And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.—ST. JOHN iv., 41, 42.

To him who reflects, the claim with which the Gospel presents itself must appear exceedingly remarkable. Wherever it comes it demands immediate belief as the first duty, and on pain of damnation; while it does not pause an instant to consider the knowledge of him whom it addresses, concerning the literary evidences of its authenticity, or his opportunity for informing himself. To the unlettered laborer, as to the laborious antiquary, it says alike: "Believe and thou shalt be saved;" and, "He that believeth not shall be damned." On the other hand, the Gospel demands an intelligent and rational faith; it contemns and sternly rejects the pretended assent of ignorance, prejudice, and subserviency; it requires us to be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us. What is the explanation of this high and exacting attitude? What is that common ground of rational evidence, accessible to every reader and hearer, upon which this claim can justly rest?

The solution of the mocking infidel is prompt and simple. The faith of the unlearned Christian, he decides, is naught but ignorance, prejudice, blind imitation, or prescription. What right, he asks, has such a man to an opinion here? What does he know of the extended and intricate discussions concerning the composition of the canon of Scripture, the history of those documents called inspired, the historical evidence of their genuineness, the correct state of their text? He does not even know one sentence of the dead languages in which they are composed! His pretended faith is, then, but the accident of his birth and rearing; and is as worthless as that of the Moslem, who believes in Islam only because he happened to be born in Arabia; or as the faith of the pagan, who worships imaginary gods only because his stupid mind has been drugged, from infancy, with the fables of polytheism.

The Papist also assails the Protestant's rule of faith (which is the Bible alone, received on rational evidence) with almost the same cavils. And this is but one instance, of several, in which Rome is found leagued with the infidel enemies of Christ. The Protestant rule of faith, says the popish controversialist, is absurd and impossible. Protestantism professes to scout an implicit faith as unworthy of a rational being. But how shall the convicted soul of the trembling sinner, who is most probably unlettered, and prevented

by the exactions of secular labor from investigation (for such are the most of mankind), who is perhaps, in addition, urged by approaching death, and harassed by sickness, perform that extensive work of inquiry necessary to an intelligent exercise of private judgment? Can he master those learned discussions? Can he become such an adept in the language of Scripture, as to verify for himself the correctness of the translation which his minister has placed in his hand? Has he time to thread the thorny mazes of the expositors, and ascertain the orthodox interpretation of its language? But, unless he has done all this, he has no right to assert a belief in the exercise of his private judgment. His faith, after all his boasts of intelligence, and pretended scorn of the implicit belief of the docile son of the Church, is but blind prescription; for this learned process is plainly impracticable for the bulk of mankind: the only difference is, that while the unlearned Romanist trusts implicitly to the authority of a holy, infallible Church, the unlearned Protestant is led blindfold by his heretical parson. Such is, in substance, the charge of the Papist.

But we reply unanswerably; that from the very nature of the human mind, belief cannot possibly arise without evidence, any more than bodily vision can take place without light. This humble and teachable son of Rome must, then, have adequate knowledge that she is the true Church, holy and infallible; that Christ has made her sovereign declaration the rule of faith to his soul, and promised salvation to him who adopts it; that some one system amidst the different ones promulgated, in the course of ages, by different popes and councils, is the true creed of the Church; that this is consistent with the teachings of the Apostles, from whom the popes claim succession. Is there not here a field of inquiry at least as extensive and thorny as that which he has imagined for the Protestant? But, unless it is investigated, the Papist has no right to hold his rule of faith; for belief without evidence is a mockery. And what means have common men to ascertain the testimony of the Church, save the instructions of their several priests? What means have they to verify the teachings of their spiritual guides, by comparing them, for themselves, with the voluminous and contradictory folios of the Roman doctors? Manifestly, then, this boasted popish rule of faith comes practically to this: that to the individual layman, his individual priest is his rule of faith, his Gospel! And this priest, as Rome herself admits, is uninspired, he works no miracles or sign to guarantee his lofty claim; he is, perhaps, not recognized in other respects, as even a man of personal integrity or sanctity. Thus terribly may their cavil be retorted.

These instances show us, my brethren, the direction in which lies the answer to the question with which we set out. Since Christ demands of us an intelligent faith, and that, irrespective of our possession or lack of literary culture, it appears plain that He regards His Gospel as containing its own self-evidencing light. The literary evidences of its divine origin, drawn by the learned from antiquity, have their value. But wherever the Bible is read with honesty, it presents within itself sufficient proof that its claims are rea-

sonable. Only on this supposition can its lofty and imperative attitude be justified.

The text presents us an apt instance of this species of internal evidence. Our Redeemer had come, an utter stranger, to the well of Sychar, and had preached His Gospel to the Samaritan woman whom He met there. She, an unworthy member of a hostile sect, knew nothing of Jesus of Nazareth; she had made no effort, as she had no means, to test His antecedents or credentials as the expected Messiah. Yet her reason showed her evidence enough of His claim in the matter of His discourse itself. With well-grounded confidence she exclaimed, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: Is not this the Christ?" The text presents us a still stronger instance of the same species of evidence. The men of the country, after hearing Jesus's preaching for two days, believed because of His own word, and said unto the woman: "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." The truth which I desire to teach you from these words is, that the contents of a message may be such as to demonstrate its authenticity, without external testimony concerning the messenger. The matter delivered by the ambassador may itself constitute his sufficient credential. So, the Gospel brings its own self-evidencing light.

That all such cavils as those of the Infidel and Papist may be met in the most thorough and candid way, I shall suppose the plain, unlettered inquirer, with no book save his English Bible, and with no means or leisure for investigation, other than the supreme importance of the subject demands of all, honestly pondering the claim which he sees God there making upon his intelligent faith. I shall not, indeed, paint the Christian's faith as the easy acquisition of folly and prejudice, or of an indolent and perfunctory glance at divine things. For, truths so sacred and grand as those of the Gospel will appear, when demonstrated to the reason, deserve and require the most laborious and impartial efforts of our faculties. But I shall suppose a case involving no other learning or wisdom than that of the simple English reader, weighing the contents of his English Bible with such diligence and impartiality as the worth of an immortal soul deserves. He has been told that the English which he reads is not the tongue in which the inspired men wrote; he is aware that the words before him profess to be a translation of the actual words of inspiration, carefully made by capable and honest, but fallible men; but he is unable to verify its fidelity for himself. The chief external proof of that point, within the reach of his mind, is but this: that he observes this English Bible possesses the confidence of all the honest, the pure, the wise, and the learned, within his acquaintance. Now let us suppose this unlettered inquirer setting himself, from this posture, to study this Book, and to decide whether it contains within itself sufficiently obvious marks of divine origin.

We shall find that the only difficulty of our task is the universal diffusion of this light of evidence over the whole field of sacred Scriptures. Our

appreciation of its elements is the less easy because of the very fact that, as Bible-readers, our minds have been immersed in it from youth. My effort to analyze it before you, and define its parts, is beset with a difficulty like that of the naturalist, who should endeavor to separate a beam of sunlight into its prismatic colors in an open field bathed with the radiance of noon-day. Were he and his spectators shut up in a darkened hall to which only one pencil of sunlight was permitted to enter, the exhibition of his theorem would be easy. But amidst the glare of midday, the very profusion of the light would serve to obscure his result. So, in my proof, my difficulty in causing you to see the analysis of the evidence arises only from the breadth and universal diffusion of the light.

I. The manifest excellence and truth to nature of the contents, and of the proposed end of revelation commend it to our minds. The most immediate and universal result of human reflection is the conviction of a God, supreme first cause, uncreated Creator of all other things. The admission of this foundation truth may be regarded as the first and loudest requirement of our reason. Well, the Bible is in perfect harmony with this requirement, in that it does not begin by going about a demonstration of the being of a God, but assumes it, as a first truth needing no inspired assertion. But, then, while this Book nobly confirms all that a correct reason could surmise of "His eternal power and godhead," it proceeds to reveal to us a circle of perfect and infinite attributes, not only of ubiquity, power, and omniscience, by which He appears competent to His whole grand work and supremacy; but of truth, righteousness, goodness, and holiness, by which He is necessarily and intuitively seen to be worthy of adoring approval and delightful moral acquiescence. Here is that perfect object, concerning which right reason cannot but say, that it is precisely thus God ought to exist. A full approbation of this excellence and glory can only be withheld at the cost of outraging our own understandings, and violating our own consciences. Does this Book paint Him with "clouds and darkness round about Him?" Yet, "justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." Nor does our reason utter any clearer dictate than this: that since the finite cannot comprehend the infinite, he would not be truly God, in whom there was, to us, no mystery.

Next, the most profound and intimate conclusion to which our reason impels us, from our belief in the being of a God, is His providence, which we recognize as a silent, but supreme superintendence impressing an order which is both wise and righteous, upon all creatures and all their actions. But, now, we find that this truth is the very key-note of the system of this Book. It proposes itself to us as nothing more than a history of this providence, which it perpetually asserts and explains. When we look into its teachings, we see there, familiarly asserted, the very truths as to God's ways and will, which furnish us the explanation of that "course of nature" which we observe around us, with its profoundest laws. The providence we actually experience, and this Book, set forth precisely the same system of things. Yea, more; the least learned of the penmen of these Scriptures habitually

announce, as their familiar maxims, those principles of the divine rule, which are the conclusions of our wisest experience; the inevitable tie between character and destiny; the dependence of posterity on the virtues of their fathers; the superintendence of a secret but sovereign will over the volitions of free agents. How strong the proof here, that the Book is from the same God, whose control we obviously see and feel in our daily lives?

When we proceed from the description it gives of God's nature and ways, to His law, we find every precept worthy of His rectitude. Whereas we know that all men are sinners, we read in this Book a code of duties absolutely without taint of sin, which condemns by its spirituality every man under heaven, and yet commands by its miraculous purity the approval of every one whom it condemns. We find a multitude of points in this code, which corrupt men could never have invented; and yet, when taught us here, they all appear evidently worthy of God, and just and wholesome for man. Especially, when we read the Decalogue, do we find what no human virtue or genius could have constructed (and, least of all, the wisdom of an age and a race formed under the debasing influences of Egyptian polytheism) a digest of all human duties, towards God and man, into ten propositions, so wondrously simple and comprehensive, that nothing is omitted, and nothing confused. The understanding of a moral creature is inevitably impelled to conclude that, if the precepts of the Bible did not come from God, they are certainly worthy of that origin, and can be reasonably accounted for by no other. For else this code of perfect holiness must be accounted the offspring of the very sins it condemns.

The marvelous consistency of these books among themselves is enough to show that they all come from one source, and that divine. They profess to have been written by different men, at intervals during more than a thousand years; and the internal evidence is enough to show that this is, in the main, true. The authors were of different languages, characters and culture: legislators, warriors, scholars, kings, priests, herdsmen, peasants, mechanics, fishermen. Yet there is such perfect agreement, and that upon subjects the most profound and mysterious, that the fiercest criticisms of eager enemies have been unable, to this day, to convict them of any substantial discrepancy! Must they not have been taught all by one infallible mind?

But, especially, when we listen to the scriptural delineations of our moral state, do we find in our own sorrowful and guilty consciousness an echo, which confesses the perfect justice and fidelity of the description. This wonderful Book does what no other, not the most ancient, history or tradition attempts: it gives the explanation of that insoluble mystery: how a ruined and polluted creature could be found amidst the handiwork of a Creator whom we must believe to be at once omnipotent, benevolent, and holy. It solves the problem by telling us that "God did create man upright: and he sought out many inventions." That after man proceeded from his Maker's hands holy and happy, he fell, and was ruined by the sin of his first father. But this is not the chief fact. I point to those clear and decisive

statements which the Bible makes of the most profound and melancholy revelations of our inner conscience; of the emptiness and vanity which our experience so bitterly realizes in all those terrene objects, to the pursuit of which we are all, nevertheless, obstinately impelled by a perverted heart; of the ineradicable spring of sinful desires within; of a will freely, and yet certainly, directed against the dictates of our own better conscience, by which will we are ever prompted to choose that evil which we are ever compelled to reprobate; of "a certain fearful looking for of judgment," which causes us to recoil from that immortality which should be our glory and joy: and of a sorrowful longing, without hope, for moral renovation, which man is yet ever too weak and sinful to effectuate. Now, I ask: By what wisdom is it, that this Book hath revealed an insight so much deeper, more honest, and more searching than any human philosophy, into this abyss of our miserable consciousness? When man's guilty soul avouches its truth in every groan of his remorse and his anguish; does it not appear obviously the utterance of Him whose eyelids try the hearts of the children of men? What artificer or impostor hath ever been wont to deal thus with the victims whom he would befool?

But among all the contents of this Book it is its professed chief end, which commends itself to the reason with most commanding force. For, the most cursory reading shows us, that its burden everywhere, its one great, perpetual announcement, its good news (godspell), is the proposal of a work which, if practicable, cannot but challenge the approval of every right mind, with a self-evidencing light as clear as our knowledge of our own existence; a work, the depreciation of whose excellence would betray, at once, a disregard of self, monstrous and suicidal, and a satanic malignity towards our fellows; a work whose mere proposal should be so full of blessing and glory, that the refutation or surrender of the hope should be resisted by man's soul with the agony of despair. This proposed work is that which no other reformer or philanthropist has ever presumed to suggest; one which the yearnings of our misery had not even emboldened us to ask. This proposal is no less than the offer of redemption to man for the glory of God: a complete deliverance from guilt by justification, and from corruption by sanctification. How unique, how satisfying to man's necessities, how worthy of Heaven, is this glorious end! It is not like the vain, wicked, and impious dreams of philosophy, or of polytheism, or of Islam: the proposal to find the elements of restoration where, from the conditions of the case, it is impossible they can exist, in the nature itself that is ruined; or to set aside the just penalty of man's ill-desert, leaving God's justice and holiness outraged; or to endow a corrupt soul with an immortal blessedness which cannot co-exist with its sinfulness. No! This gospel offer goes to the foundation of the needed work. It proposes to engage the omnipotence, love, and wisdom of God Himself, both to satisfy divine justice, and to restore man's ruin in sin; so that the deliverance shall fully satisfy every demand of offended Heaven, and every necessity of fallen humanity, and endow us with a new blessedness as

righteous as it is precious, and as everlasting as it is righteous. Must not every right soul exclaim: Oh, if this news may but be true, never can there descend from the skies a word so dear to man, so worthy of God! At its announcement must not every most pious and reverent aspiration for His honor concur with every right longing of the hungry soul for its own good, and every impulse of benevolence for others, in the ardent wish that the reason may find full evidence that the glad news is true? And why should the most jealous caution resist that joyful conclusion? Methinks there is abundant confirmation in the message itself; a message too grand and strange to be the fiction of man's folly; too pure, and noble, and righteous, and benevolent, to be the invention of a malignant imposter.

II. If one were sick and full of anguish with a mortal disease, and an entire stranger were to come to him and profess the kindly purpose of healing, every man must say that the proposal is wholly right and good. To test the character of this stranger, it would only remain to see whether his ability and secret intention corresponded with his profession. So let us now consider that Redeemer whom this Book proposes to us, as the physician of our souls' malady. Time forbids dwelling upon the constitution of His person, as God in man, and thus able for His undertaking: or unfolding the perfect adaptation of the offices He assumes to bear, as prophet, priest, and king, to our necessities: or to dwell upon His miracles and predictions, as divine sanctions of His claim. Moreover, I promised that I would not go outside of those materials of proof which the plain reader can find in his English Bible. All that I claim on the above point is, that the reader's common sense must approve the fitness of the character and function which Jesus Christ seems to assume for the redeeming work He assumes to undertake. If there can be a real salvation for sinners, it must be by atonement and new birth. And these must be wrought by one who has more than human power to renew us, and more than any creature's independence of law and worth of dignity, to pay His life for a world of sinners. Such do we find Christ's pretensions in this Book. He is here said to be both son of Man, and Son of God, in one person; to have authority to lay down His life and take it again; to have given this life for the sins of the world; and to exercise a divine power in baptizing the hearts of sinners with the Holy Ghost. The question is: Are these wondrous claims true? I offer you, in proof, the lovely and perfect character of Jesus, as painted by the Evangelists. We read these four histories, and we find there described a being, who, from His cradle to His cross, was never guilty of a fault, or even a foible. He is represented to us as having displayed every virtue of the perfect man, along with the majesty and might of Deity. His love and beneficence were only equalled by His truth and rectitude. His only occupation on earth was doing good; His only ambition was to bear away, or at least to lighten, the sorrows of others. To the claims of self-love, avarice, ambition, He displayed a lofty insensibility, such as no human character has ever approached; yea, such as the imagination of man had never dreamed of imputing to its most glowing creations

With boundless power at His command, He was never once seen to employ it to gratify, or aggrandize, or avenge Himself; it was used only to bless others, while He remained so poor, that "He had not where to lay His head." When He opened His mouth, it was to "speak as never man spake;" His discourses breathed only purity, wisdom and love. Heaven and earth alike pronounced this character "holy, harmless, undefiled;" the utmost malice could bring no taint upon it by the foulest arts of subornation: the pagan procurator who condemned Him testified that no fault could be found in Him; the very traitor who betrayed Him was constrained to declare Him innocent, as He went, lashed by the furies of remorse, to His own place. His sanctity was tested by the fiery furnace of slander, persecution, and murder; yet there was no alloy; equally meek and magnanimous, with a spirit as inflexible in its moral courage as divine in its forgiveness, He only shone with a purer radiance in the furnace. But why do I attempt to describe that which is indescribable? The moral beauty of this character so reveals itself to the intuitions of the humblest mind as well as to the most cultivated, that your own conception of it perpetually transcends in glory all the images of rhetoric. I thank God that it is so; and that a complete portraiture is as needless as it is impossible. For herein is the value of this character, that it requires no training, or logic, or effort, for its apprehension: it commends itself as immediately to the heart of the child or peasant, as of the wise or learned.

Now, is this picture authentic? Did this man, Jesus, truly speak these words, and live this life, and die this death in Judea? Then, what He said I must believe, as true by the evidence of this spotless integrity, love, and faithfulness; true by all the irresistible beauty of this character. To tell me that such virtues as His could be the inventor of a lie, and that, a lie so base, so unfeeling, so impious, as this would have been, outrages both my reason and my heart; as though one should tell me that night with her blackness of darkness was the parent of the light, and death the author of life. What would you have said to me, if I, in my youth, after witnessing from my infancy the steady, consistent integrity of my honored father, and after owing so many years to his faithfulness and love, had refused credit to his word, on the pretext, that I had myself never seen the thing which he affirmed to me? You would have decided, with disgust, that I showed the head of a fool, in that I could be blind to the evidence of such consistency, and the heart of a scoundrel, in that I refused the instinctive homage of my confidence to such virtue. Even so, if you now saw such a being as Jesus is described, performing His ministry of love and sanctity under your observation, you would be constrained to credit His word. When I contemplate the personal character of Jesus Christ, I feel that I can trust everything to His veracity.

But the objection may be imagined: that this life and character are not under the inspection of this plain reader of the English Bible as a present reality: all that he knows is, that this Book in his hands, which professes to be a correct translation of certain histories said to be eighteen hundred years

old, describes such a life and character. I reply, this is enough. For there stands the wondrous description; the question whence it came must be answered in some way. Only two answers are possible; either it is a fiction, or it is not. Will any one dare to say it is a fiction? Then he must hold that a company of liars have composed the noblest and most beautiful model of truth ever seen among men; that the loveliest image of virtue which has ever entranced the admiration of the wise and good is the invention of the most loathsome vice. For, how foul, how cruel, how profane must have been the temper which could deliberately set itself to forge such a cheat, in mockery at once, of God's majesty and mercy, and of man's dangers and woes? That an exploit of genius which the noblest intellect and heart of scholar has never equalled, and which the most profound critics most appreciate as an inimitable achievement, should have been the work of men who were ignorant at once, and base; and that these hateful imposters expended all this miraculous art in constructing an imaginary picture, of which the only apparent result is to condemn their own falsehood in inventing it. This is, indeed, a greater miracle than the miracles of the Gospel; it is more, an impossibility. He who can believe this is more credulous than the most insolent skeptic has represented the humble Christian.

Here, then, is the result of these converging lines of evidence: That while all else in the Bible is manifestly worthy of God, so far as it is comprehended; this great proposal of the Book, to restore man to holiness, obedience, and happiness, is so self-evidently right and good, that to reject it is, at once, a crime and folly. And that the Redeemer sent to do this good work presents a character so consistent with His proposed mission, that reason and virtue both demand for Him our full confidence.

III. We now make a third appeal to the common-sense of our supposed inquirer, the materials of which are presented by every sane and honest man's intelligence. We ask him to verify the authenticity or falsehood of this Gospel news, by its effects on society around him. Cast your eye, my friend, upon the people within your own knowledge. You see a society embracing a part of these people, called the Christian Church, which professes to have made this Book the rule of its life. Now, the demonstration is in this fact, that the people in this society all verify precisely the results indicated in the Book. Among some of them you observe an inconsistency between holy professions and unholy conduct, expressly foretold by the book, and presenting you with an impressive instance of the malignity of that disease of sin, which the Book imputes to natural men. But among others of the society, you observe, what the Bible has also predicted, instances of the sincere adoption and efficacious influence of the Gospel; and uniformly you see that the character of these is lovely and deserving just in proportion to the degree of fulness with which they embrace and feel the truths of their Bibles. The effect of the Book on their characters, precisely as they permit it to have its legitimate effect, is to produce a result of such self-evident excellence, that to condemn it, or to refuse it your hearty approval, is an outrage against your own reason and

conscience. Moreover, you notice, that not only are those the best people who most sincerely embrace and follow this Book ; but that nearly all that is truly good in society flows, directly or indirectly, from the influence of this Book and these people. You think that you discover, here and there, a gentleman who is honorable and benevolent, or a lady who is pure and amiable, who is not a votary of the Bible ? Yes ; but when you examine the origin of these persons, you probably find that they derived these lovely qualities towards their fellow-men from Christian parents, who drew all their graces from this holy Book. Now I appeal to your common-sense—"Doth an evil tree bear good fruit ?" "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ?" If the Bible is false, and infidelity true, how is it that error here bears the precious fruits of truth ? If you still deny that this Gospel is from God, then it would appear, that so preposterous are the conditions of man's existence here, it is necessary for him to believe a lie, in order for him to make the nearest approach to his true welfare, and the true ends of his existence.

But this is only a part of the argument. When you study a little the effects of the Bible upon those who are most obviously its sincere receivers, you perceive that it has been the instrument of a change in them, for which nature cannot account. You saw, that the Book promised to its recipients a quickening of the soul dead in sin, by God's own power: a new birth by the Holy Ghost. Astonishing, audacious promise ! But here are some instances in which it is verified. Here and there, among these nominal, or questionable Christians, are some, who present the undoubted evidence of a long and consistent life, that they are truly actuated by a heavenly principle. Now you, my friend, know enough of human nature, without any Bible, to perceive that this spiritual principle is not naturally in man, and that there is no power in his nature to generate it. You see all men, you see yourself uniformly, originally, certainly devoted to the world and self-will, in preference to God. It is manifestly the radical law of our natural disposition of heart. You may sometimes, or often, have had religious thoughts and purposes. But you are perfectly aware that they were not godly or heavenly; the best of them were but the efforts which self-love, in the form of awakened fear, exacted of your unwilling souls. You know that you have always yielded to, or at least harbored, the unconquerable desire to return to sin, so soon as the spur of remorse was a little withdrawn. But these genuine Christians not only refrain from sin, but hate it; they not only tolerate duty, but delight in it ! They manifest a permanent revolution of soul away from self and sin to godliness. Your own understanding also shows you very plainly that such a change as this bespeaks more than earthly power; that the stream of volitions cannot of themselves rise higher than their own fountain in the ungodly heart; that the attractions of heavenly-mindedness cannot, by their mere, native power, as inducements, reverse that disposition which is naturally dead to them. These persons were obviously "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John i., 13.)

Here, then, is a proof of the divine origin of the Gospel as practical and impressive as a visible miracle. The Book promises such a change to those who embrace it. The change is above the powers of nature. But lo! in those cases where the truth is heartily received it actually occurs. What verification could be more complete?

And, now, will any one attempt to break the force of this evidence, by pointing me to the multitude of doubtful or spurious Christians? Is it thus insinuated that the reality of the divine change in any given case is uncertain? I reply: What of the many counterfeits? Is not their existence exactly what Jesus Christ predicted? The question is, whether there has not been at least one, within the range of your own observation, whose Christian integrity was unquestionable? For a single genuine case reveals the finger of God. And I will not believe that you have been so unblessed, as never to have possessed at least one such heavenly-minded friend! I point you back to the chambers of your own memory; I call up the venerated forms of your dead, who dwell enshrined in your hearts' recollections; I point you to that revered relative, most probably a sainted woman, your aunt, your gentle sister, your mother, whose Christian love was at once the sweetest blessing, and the holiest lesson of your life. Recall, I pray you, the light of that pure example whose benignant beams filled your home with peace and quiet joy. Remember that steadfast, generous heart, whose unselfish affection was the solace of all your sorrows; the unwearied life of magnanimous self-forgetfulness; the generous patience which bore all your waywardness, and took no revenge save by blessing; the unquenched fire of devotion, burning on with steady flame in privacy, in prosperity, in sorrow; and that calm, radiant face with which she was wont to come down at twilight from the chamber of her secret communings with God. Especially do I remind you of the end; which set the seal upon the consistent testimony of the whole life; when you saw the gentle sufferer lie upon her dying bed, and received the last blessings of a love whose unselfish flame death could not quench; when you beheld her awaiting, peaceful, weak it may be, contrite and prostrate, yet unappalled, the last approach of that enemy, whose most distant threat, as you well know, fills your guilty heart with shuddering; and you witnessed her triumph over his sting by the strength of her Redeemer. Ah! you know that there was a principle in that breast which you have not, and which the world cannot bestow. It was the new nature received through this Gospel. I testify unto you, that God gave you this holy example, and blessed you with this Christian love, in order to convince you by the demonstration of a present, living wonder of His grace, that His Gospel is no cunningly devised fable. Perhaps you have said to yourself, that had you been an eye witness of the reputed miracles of Jesus; had you stood with those Jews of Bethany beside the opening grave, and seen Lazarus come forth at the call of the divine voice, bound with grave-clothes, you, too, would have believed. But you ask: How do I know that these ancient narratives are authentic? How can I verify them across the chasm of eighteen centuries? I reply: Here God has given

you, by the ministry of this same Gospel, a moral miracle, a spiritual resurrection, as unquestionable, and if viewed aright, as impressive as those; the quickening of a dead soul.

Thus the Bible contains, in its own message and effects, evidence which is sufficient for the honest, uneducated mind. This evidence has been represented to you here, as appealing not only to the reason, but the conscience. Will any hearer object, for this cause, to its strict, demonstrative force? Shall it be urged against me, that I have presented rather a sentimental than a logical view of these evidences? I claim that this is no derogation from its just force; it is, rather, the glory and strength of the argument. For those moral judgments which I have addressed are the highest, the most intuitive, and the most imperative functions of the reason. The student of numbers has a rational judgment of the truth of this statement; that in division, the larger the divisor, the smaller the quotient. So he has a conscientious judgment that Judas was criminal in betraying his Master; and it is attended with a lively sentiment of reprobation. But is the mind any the less certain that the latter proposition is true, than that the arithmetical one is true? Not a whit. When conscience announces her verdict for the right and just, it is as supremely rational as the clearest judgments of science.

Moral and spiritual judgments, then, are no less logical than the scientific. But, my hearers, there is an all-important difference between them; a difference in favor of my cause. The moral truth, when recognized, brings to your soul instantaneous and imperative obligation. Your conviction immediately binds you to the corresponding right action, by a claim which cannot be resisted or postponed without criminality. We looked at the proposition that, in every division, the greater the divisor the smaller the quotient. Suppose one should deny its universal truths? We should say only that he must have a queer sort of mind. Or let us suppose that you admit the arithmetical truth. What then? Why: nothing! unless you have some arithmetical process to work. But now I come to you with a different, a moral proposition: I tell you that in yonder prison there is a venerable man, naked, sick, friendless, and falsely accused: I show you evidence which identifies this pitiable sufferer with the generous benefactor of your youth, who was long lost to your knowledge. The proof of identity is such that your mind cannot but admit its full force. And now, what? This! That there immediately emerge for you the obligations to gratitude, to beneficent action, requiring the former kindnesses of your suffering friend; and to refuse or even to delay that action brands you not as erroneous only, but as blameworthy. So, in this Gospel argument, the appeal to the rational intuition is partly moral, and not merely logical; and therefore faith is a duty, and unbelief is a sin. Thus the cavil is exploded, which objected against the Gospel-system, because it erected the soul's state of belief either into a virtue or a crime. It is because the belief on Christ involves right judgments of conscience and choices of heart, as well as correct notion is in the intellect. This solemn trait of the Gospel is, therefore, strictly con-

sistent. Hearer, will you now do your duty by becoming "obedient to the faith?"

I now take you to witness that, in establishing the truth of this Gospel, I have used no other materials than that familiar knowledge and common sense, which the humblest reader, if honest, may bring to his English Bible. Here, then, is the mode in which it becomes a practical rule of faith for common men. And here is the answer to the sneer, that the faith of such Christians is but senseless prescription or prejudice. To the right heart, the Gospel is its own sufficient witness.

From this point of view, you see it to be a reasonable assertion, that the best book to be read by him who is inquiring into the evidences of the Bible, is the Bible itself. This is no paradox. There is a stranger who wishes to be received as a trustworthy person; he offers you certain testimonials from abroad, which, he claims, will prove satisfactory when verified. But you, as a practical man, thrust them aside; you prefer to converse with the stranger himself. If you can do so frequently and intimately enough, to gain a thorough personal acquaintance, you prefer to judge him for yourself. Thus do we with the Bible. Search the Scriptures honestly and diligently, and you will find out whether they are from God, or whether they speak of themselves.

PAUL'S THEME (*Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.*—I. COR. ii., 2).—The cross of Christ was the theme upon which Paul turned all the faculty, power and ability he had. "This one thing I do," said he. His motto was—All for Jesus, and for Jesus only.

The one topic the Apostle brought forward in different ways. When addressing the chief men of the Jews in Rome, observe that he expounded, and testified, and persuaded. These three methods were needful among the people of those days; and they are the wisest that can be adopted to bring men to Christ even now. We must *expound*, set forth, explain, make clear the Gospel. We must tell men what the Word of God means, in the plainest possible language; for they need to know what it is that the revelation from Heaven has really declared. The more of true exposition the better. We must also *testify*. We must bear witness to the effect which the Gospel has had upon our heart and life. The telling out of our personal experience is a means of grace to our hearers. Paul was wont to describe his own conversion; but the narrative of his conversion was not intended at all to honor himself, but to glorify that blessed Christ, who out of Heaven had spoken to him, and called him to be a chosen vessel to bear His word to the Gentiles. There is much force in such a personal testimony. We should speak of Jesus in a happy, grateful, earnest manner, and commend Him as a Saviour to our fellow-sinners. Yet this was not all; our Apostle was not satisfied simply to expound and testify; his heart was full of love to his countrymen; and, therefore, he *persuaded* them. He entreated, he besought, he implored his hearers to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*