

*With the Author's profound respect & gratitude*

# *Is the Bible Infallible?*

SPEECHES

IN

THE REV. DR. DODS' CASE,

*IN THE FREE PRESBYTERY OF GLASGOW, ON  
5th SEPTEMBER AND 27th NOVEMBER, 1877.*

BY THE

REV. ROBERT BREMNER, M.A.,  
GLASGOW.

REVISED AND CORRECTED.

WITH DR. C. HODGE OF PRINCETON'S LETTER, AND AN  
APPENDIX CONTAINING THE COMMITTEE OF  
PRESBYTERY'S REPORT.

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founded on the presence of such apparent errors, the Christian need not hesitate to tread under his feet, especially as, if we had all the light and knowledge that God could give us upon the point, it would speedily be found that, just as such a speck of sandstone as that referred to, even if found in the Parthenon, did not originally form a part of the marble, but was subsequently introduced into it by some convulsion of nature, so either the alleged errors or discrepancies of the Bible were not real, but simply apparent, or had been introduced into the text by transcribers, and formed no part of the original documents.

That this, and not Dr. Adam's "indubitable (!) inference," is the real meaning of Dr. Hodge, and the only object he had in view in making use of this illustration, and that nothing could have been more foreign to his thoughts or intentions in using it than the idea of inculcating that there are real errors, mistakes, and inaccuracies in the Bible, is evident, not only from the passages already quoted, but from the words which immediately follow the quotations given in the report. They are the following:—"Admitting that the Scriptures do contain, in a few instances, discrepancies which with our present means of knowledge we are unable satisfactorily to explain, they furnish no rational ground for denying their infallibility."

Should any further demonstration of the unwarrantableness of the use which the Committee have made in their report of Dr. C. Hodge's name and writings be required, it will be found in the following letter which I had the honour and privilege of receiving from that venerable gentleman on Saturday last, and which, with the Presbytery's permission, I shall now read.

PRINCETON, 2nd Nov., 1877.

MY DEAR SIR,—It would be very presumptuous in me to take part in any theological discussion going on in your venerable Presbytery. You condescend, however, to ask me what views I intended to present on the doctrine of Inspiration in my work on Systematic Theology. I think I may without impropriety answer that question without assuming that any great importance attached to any views of mine.

In order to avoid, as much as possible, even the appearance of taking part in a controversy with which I have no right to interfere, I write this letter before reading any of the documents you were good enough to send me.

All I purpose to do, is to state as briefly and as plainly as I can what I intended to teach in my Systematic Theology.

1. I recognise the obvious distinction between Revelation and Inspiration. The former is the communication of truth to the mind. The latter renders its subject trustworthy, *i.e.*, infallible in communicating truth, orally or by writing, to others.

2. The *modus operandi* of the Spirit is inscrutable, as it is in regeneration, and the gift of miraculous powers. All we know about it is from its effects. These are to be learned from didactic statements of the Scriptures, and from their phenomena. From the former we learn—

*First*, That inspiration rendered its subject the spokesman of God—that is, a prophet. An inspired man stood in the same relation to God, that Aaron stood to Moses in his intercourse with Pharaoh. What Aaron said to Pharaoh Moses said through him. What the prophet said, God said. “I will put my words into your mouth.” “Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Therefore what David said the Holy Ghost said. What Jeremiah said the Holy Ghost said. Our Lord said to his apostles, “It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of my Father that speaketh in you.” It is recorded that the apostles “spake as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

*Second*, This divine authority, or infallibility, attaches to everything which inspired men taught, that is, to everything which they asserted to be true, whether fact, doctrine, or moral principle.

*Third*, It extends to the words. The thought is in the words. If the words be incorrectly chosen, the mind of the Spirit is incorrectly communicated, or not communicated at all. This seems to be explicitly asserted in the Scriptures. Holy men spake as they were moved—they spake as the Spirit gave them utterance—it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of my Father that speaketh in you. The apostle says, “We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” The sacred writers quote, and argue from the words, sometimes from a single word, of Scripture as the Word of God.

*Fourth*, It follows from what has been said that the record is inspired, or infallible. This the apostle asserts (2 Tim. iii. 16), “All Scripture (or every Scripture—every part of the sacred writings) is given by inspiration of God.” The Scriptures—what is written—cannot be broken. Such is the declaration of Christ. It is the written word to which our Lord and the apostles constantly refer as of divine authority. The ultimate appeal as to all matters of fact, truth, or duty, was to the written word.

*From the phenomena of Scripture we learn—*

*First*, That the sacred writers were not mere machines. Inspiration did not destroy their intelligent consciousness or self-control.

*Second*, It did not interfere with their characteristic peculiarities of thought, speech, or style, any more than it did with their handwriting. Paul seems to intimate that his handwriting was rather peculiar. The Spirit so controlled the sacred penmen in the use of their gifts and faculties, that they should say just what He would have them say.

According to this doctrine of inspiration, there can be no errors in the teachings of the Bible. One part cannot contradict any other part, nor can what the Bible declares to be true as to fact or doctrine be inconsistent with any other fact or doctrine known to be true from other sources. That there are great difficulties in the way of this doctrine, is a matter of course. The same is true in regard to the doctrines of revelation—the Trinity, the person of Christ, the work of the Spirit. It is no less true of the doctrines of natural religion, and, in short, of every department of knowledge. Who can form any theory of the union of the soul

and body, which is not beset with difficulties which he cannot solve?

It is to be remembered that it is of the Bible as it came from the hands of the sacred writers—*i.e.*, of the true text, and of the Bible as properly interpreted—that this infallibility is asserted. There may be discrepancies between one part of the Scripture and other parts, arising from errors of transcribers. Far more numerous and important difficulties have their origin in erroneous interpretations. Everybody knows that the Bible was for ages understood to teach that the sun moves round the earth. Does any man now so understand it? Increase of knowledge will shed increasing light on the Bible; not correcting it, but bringing out more clearly its true meaning. Should we find in the Bible here and there phenomena which we cannot reconcile with what the Bible teaches of itself, that cannot be a rational ground for rejecting those teachings. It is so in nature. There are organs and rudiments of organs in animals, the use of which no physiologist can explain. No theist allows that fact to shake his faith in the doctrine of design. We do and must believe that God fashions our body, although He allows malformations sometimes to occur. So it is with the Bible. It is and remains the Word of God, although there may be things in it which we cannot explain.

I cannot rid myself of the impression that there is something absurd in my writing you such an A B C letter as this, merely to prove that an old man in America believes the common Church doctrine of inspiration. The accepted formula to express the doctrine of the Church in all ages, on this subject, is, that the Scriptures were written *Dictante Spiritu Dei*, so that whatever the Bible teaches God teaches. If this be true, our feet are on a rock. If it be not true, we are standing on quicksand.

The dear old Church of Scotland is the brightest star of the Reformation. May its lustre never be dimmed, until it is lost in the glory of the second coming of the Lord!

Your fellow-labourer in the Gospel,

(Signed) CHARLES HODGE.

*P.S.*—If there be anything in this paper incousistent with what is written in my book, it is because I failed to make myself understood. What I have here written I was taught in my boyhood, and have always intended to teach.

(Signed) C. H.

How diametrically opposite all this is to the teaching of the sermon and preface before us, in which the apparent discrepancies and inaccuracies of the Bible are declared to be real errors—errors which existed from the very first, and which no amount of additional light or knowledge could show to be anything else than downright mistakes—mistakes which, in the author's judgment, are utterly inconsistent with the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture, which he accordingly emphatically denies. And yet the Committee have the courage to tell us that the author of this sermon contends for nothing more than is covered by the quotations they give us from Dr. C. Hodge!