

# Notes on Biblical Exposition

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## XXIV. THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

*"Just as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Know, therefore that those who are of faith, these are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham, to the effect: 'In thee all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Gal. 3:6-7, in a literal translation).*

### The Argument from Scripture



IN the last number of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, we considered the first of the arguments which Paul adduces in favor of the great central doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from all human merit. "You received the Holy Spirit, plainly manifested," the Apostle says, "by receiving in simple faith the story of the Cross, before you ever heard of the Judaizers or ever thought of trying to attain merit by your own observance of God's law. But if you received the Holy Spirit thus apart from the works of the law, what more can you possibly expect to have through your works; what can possibly be higher than the presence of the Spirit of God? Nay, in seeking to establish your own merit, you are doing despite to the Spirit of God, and are really descending from the Spirit to the flesh—to the things in which unaided humanity relies."

This month we turn to the second of Paul's arguments. It is the argument from Scripture, and to it Paul attaches here as always supreme weight. It was particularly important, of course, in dealing with the Judaizers: in their insistence upon observance of the ceremonial law they had no doubt appealed to the Old Testament against Paul; and it was important, therefore, for Paul to show that their interpretation of the Old Testament was wrong. But only the shallowest reading of the Epistles can possibly lead a man to think that the Apostle's appeal to the Old Testament was merely an argumentative device—useful in defeating the Judaizers but not valuable in the Apostle's own mind. Nothing could be further from the fact. As a matter of fact, to Paul as well as to our Lord Jesus Himself, the written Word of God was decisive in all controversy. People who make "the teachings of Christ" instead of the whole Bible the seat of authority in religion are doing despite to the teachings of Christ themselves; and people who make what they wrongly call "the living Spirit," in opposition to the written Word, an independent source of our knowledge of God are doing despite to that blessed Holy Spirit

by whose gracious ministration the written Word has been given unto men. Let it never be forgotten that the real source of life for the Church is the holy Book; when the Church seeks life apart from the Book, as it is doing today, then it always faces, as it faces today, a terrible loss of power. If the Bible were rediscovered, as it was rediscovered at the time of the Reformation, we should have in the Church today the same new life as that which then set the world aflame.

### The Promise to Abraham

It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul appeals here to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They were authoritative in the Gentile churches from the very beginning just as much as in the Jewish churches.

"Just as Abraham believed God," says Paul, "and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." The proof from Scripture joins so closely to that which has preceded that some modern editors place the paragraph division after this first verse instead of before it. "When the Holy Spirit was so plainly manifested in the Galatian churches, not on the basis of human merit, but simply on the basis of the grace of God received by faith, that," Paul says, "was in exact accord with what happened when Abraham became right with God not on the basis of works, not on the basis of his own merit, but through faith."

The Old Testament passage which Paul is here quoting is Gen. 15:6. In the fourth chapter of Romans he quotes the same passage and expounds it more fully; and, in general, the best commentary on this whole part of the Epistle to the Galatians is the fuller treatment of the same subject in Romans.

In Gen. 15:6, Abraham is represented as believing the promise of God that he should have numerous descendants—that his seed should be as the stars for multitude. But that was only one of the promises of God to him; and the Apostle rightly treats the promises as forming a unity. In the promise of a numerous progeny was included the blessed promise of that One of Abraham's descendants through whom the blessing should come to all mankind. Abraham believed the promise, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness—that is, it was through his faith, not through any good works of his, that he was made right with God.

### Christianity Not a New Religion

It is a great mistake to say that Christianity, as over against the old dispensation, was a "new religion"; indeed, it is a mistake to say that Christianity is a religion at all,

among other religions. On the contrary, there is just one revealed religion, and the revelation that is at the basis of it is recorded in both the Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament saints were saved in just the same way as that in which the New Testament saints are saved—namely, by the death of Christ—and the means by which the Spirit of God applied to them the benefits of Christ's death was exactly the same as the means by which the same Spirit applies those benefits to Christians today—namely, faith. The Old Testament saints, like Christians today, received the gospel of the grace of God; and, like the New Testament saints, they received it by faith. The only difference is that the gospel was proclaimed to the Old Testament saints by way of promise, while to us it is proclaimed by way of narrative of what has already been done. Immediately after the Fall of man, the plan of God for salvation began to be executed—with the promise contained in Gen. 3:15—and the men who are saved in accordance with that plan are not adherents of "a religion" among other religions; they are not men who have built upon a common human fund of "religion" certain special religions known as "Judaism" and "Christianity," but they are men to whom God has supernaturally revealed and supernaturally applied His saving work. That one revealed "religion" does not differ from the religions of mankind merely in degree; its supremacy does not consist even in being the one perfect religion as over against the imperfect ones; but it is different from the religions of mankind because, while they represent man's efforts to find God, this "religion" is built upon the sovereign and gracious and entirely unique act by which God found man and saved him from the guilt and power of sin.

### The One Way of Salvation

To that marvellous unity and uniqueness of God's saving work both in the old dispensation and in the new, the Apostle Paul appeals in the passage now before us. "Know, therefore," he says, "that those who are of faith, these are sons of Abraham." Not those who are descended from Abraham by ordinary generation, not those who have united themselves to Abraham's descendants by circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses, certainly not those who have tried—vainly—to attain merit with God by any kind of observance of God's law, but those who have the same faith as that which Abraham had are his true sons and the true heirs of the promises which God gave to him.

"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham, to the effect: 'In thee shall all the nations be blessed.'" Here we have a reference to Gen. 12:3, the same passage being quoted in a speech of the Apostle Peter in Acts 3:25. When the Scripture said, reporting the words of God to Abraham, 'In thee shall all the nations be blessed'—that is, 'The blessing that is now pronounced upon thee, Abraham, shall be a blessing to all the nations'—when the Scripture said that, it said it in view of this fact which we now see before us, that God is pronouncing the Gentiles and

not merely the Jews to be righteous through faith; now we see the fulfilment of that ancient promise of God.

"So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham." That is the conclusion of this first division of Paul's argument from Scripture. "Abraham was justified by faith, not by works," says Paul; "and those who are of faith, being his true descendants, share his blessing."

### Editorial Notes—Concluded

Thus far and no farther shalt thou go? Can we not do more, and insist that great sums of money given by saints in the past and still poured out by living givers, most of whom were and are conservatives, shall be put to the use they intended." Apart from the allegation that the differences that have been dividing the conservatives are "unimportant" this editorial as a whole has our hearty approval.

It is high time that those who love the Lord in all sincerity and heartiness were awakened to the fact that there are many within the churches who not only reject the gospel but are bent on employing the church itself as an instrument for propagating essentially pagan conceptions, conceptions of life and destiny. By using orthodox language to express unorthodox conceptions, by representing basic differences as only minor differences of interpretation, by crying "Peace, peace; when there is no peace," they have long kept multitudes of Christians in ignorance of the fact that the foundations were being undermined by those of their own household. If the Laymen's Mission Report be the occasion of arousing those who are Christians in fact as well as name and of leading them to insist that the Church of Christ bear undivided testimony to the gospel of the grace of God, it will prove to be a blessing in disguise. There was less warrant for ABRAHAM LINCOLN to say that this country could not remain half free and half slave than there is for saying that the Christian Church can remain half evangelical and half modernist.

### The One Page Sermon—Concluded

The Bible is passing; what a shame. The world's greatest book; God's only book. God has made many worlds, but only one book.

My friends, can it be that we are helping to destroy the church and the influence of Christ in our day? The church of Christ can not, of course, be destroyed permanently. The Kingdom of God is sure; the gates of hell shall not prevail ultimately against the church. Our apathy and unbelief hurt chiefly our souls and our day. Despite our smug complacency and indifference the true church will live. God forbid that the visible church, with its work of charity and redemption, should be made ineffectual in our time. We pray that active, genuine, effectual Christianity may live. May real Christianity live. May it live amid the galaxy of our noblest institutions; may it live expressing itself in deeds of beneficence, in the prayers of the faithful, in the esteem of the righteous; may it live in minds that are cultured, in hearts that are sanctified, in spirits that are perfected, in lives that are glorified. May it live long, honored, triumphant and beloved. May it live forever blessing and forever blessed!

The years seem long, the tears grow strong,  
Faith falters and is dumb.  
But God's time is a certain time,  
And this will surely come.