

THE BIBLE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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The question with which we are to concern ourselves in this lecture is the relationship of the Bible to the Christian faith. Our purpose will not be to discuss that question in great detail or fulness for in one lecture such a procedure would manifestly be impossible. For that matter it will not be possible even to consider every aspect of the question. What we are principally to be concerned with is whether the Bible is really important for our Christian faith or whether we can be good Christians even if we did not have the Bible.

At first sight such a question might seem almost irrelevant or flippant. Of course, we must have the Bible, one is tempted to retort, who would deny that? On closer examination, however, we find that there are those who do in effect deny that the Bible is really essential to Christianity. There are many who so depreciate the Scriptures that when they have finished, one wonders just what use the Scriptures do serve. At any rate, it is necessary that we devote some attention to this all important question.

An Evangelical Testimony

Before we proceed further it may be well to consider what one of the great creeds of Christendom has to say concerning the importance of the Scriptures for faith. We shall turn to the Westminster Confession. In the first chapter we read: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (I:VI.). This is a strong statement, and also, unlike many modern attempts to state doctrine, it is a clear statement. One knows just what the Confession is talking about.

According to the Confession there is a counsel of God on certain very important matters. That means that God has given to man His will and design concerning these subjects. Where, however, are we to find this counsel of God? Not in the "mind of the church" according to the Confession. Nor do we find it in the individual local churches. Indeed, we do not find it in man at all. We find it rather in a Book, and that Book is the Bible. Furthermore

God's whole counsel is set down in Scripture, according to the Confession. This counsel of God is said to embrace "all things necessary" for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life. In other words, if man is to glorify God he will find in the Scripture all that is necessary for him to know of God's counsel on the subject. If he is to live aright, knowing what he is to believe and how he is to act, again he must turn to the Scriptures, and there he will find all things that are necessary in order that he may have salvation, faith and life.

In the Scriptures, then, there is a final revelation from God upon these vital subjects, and inasmuch as this revelation of God's counsel is final, no additions to it are to be made. Even if someone or some group, such as a church body, should think that they have new revelations from the Spirit, they are not to add these to the Scriptures. These new revelations are not revelations at all; they come not from God; they are not part of His counsel, and they are to be rejected. They are not to be added to the Scriptures. To say that such a position regards the Scriptures as of supreme importance is to put the matter mildly.

In the first section of the first chapter of the Confession we are told that the Holy Scriptures are most necessary, and the reason given for this is that God's former ways of revelation have ceased, and these must be written down and preserved in writing. All God's revelations of Old Testament times have ceased and so in order that the truth might be the better preserved, these had to be committed wholly unto writing. Again, we are told of the importance of the Holy Scriptures.

According to the Westminster Confession, then, we may say that if we are to live a Christian life, we must learn from the Bible how we are to do so. The Bible tells us the duty which God requires of us, and without the Bible we simply cannot live the life that God would have us live. Our own ideas as to what is right and what is wrong are not sufficient. Our minds are darkened by sin, and what we think is right, all too often is wrong. We need the light of God's truth in order that we do not go astray. There can be no Christian life that is not based upon the truth revealed unto us in the Bible.

Likewise, we simply cannot have the Christian religion without the Bible. The Bible tells us what we are to believe about God, and apart from the revelation of the Bible, we shall simply fall into gross error. The entire content of the Christian Faith, in other words, is derived from the Bible. Conceivably the content of the Christian religion could have been handed down from generation to generation by means of oral tradition alone. This, however, is exceedingly questionable. Tradition very soon becomes corrupted, and unless there had been special supernatural preservation, it is very questionable that we today might have any Christian faith at all. At any rate, tradition has not been the means whereby the Christian religion has been handed down to us. To learn what Christianity is, we must turn to the Scriptures. Their importance cannot be over-emphasized.

A Modern Apologetic

To say that modern theologians disagree with what has just been stated, is to put it mildly. In one way after another the significance and importance of the Bible is minimized. We shall consider in some detail one particular modern attempt to defend Christianity at the

expense of the Scriptures. The Bampton Lectures for 1962 were given by Alan Richardson, Professor of Christian Theology in the University of Nottingham, and these have now been published under the title, History Sacred and Profane.¹

These lectures are very learned and very worth while reading. They present, among other things, a survey of much modern literature on the subject of history and history writing, and they offer a cogent refutation of the view of history espoused by Barth and others of the neo-orthodox school. Richardson has done good service here. He clearly rejects the distinction which so often is made today between the realms of Historie and Geschichte, and disallows any defense of Christianity along such lines. His own defense of Christianity, however, we believe, is also fallacious, but it is worthy of some consideration in connection with the question which forms the subject of our own lecture.

Richardson approaches the question of the resurrection of Christ. What kind of evidence, he asks, would lead one to the conclusion that the resurrection of Christ was an event of history? Richardson is very emphatic as to what he means. In speaking of history he stresses that he means ordinary history and not some eschatological realm of sacred history. There are two conditions he thinks, which would have to be met. In the first place, there must be the credible attestation of witnesses to the event which could not be more satisfactorily accounted for on some other hypothesis. In other words, there should be the testimony of eyewitnesses to the empty tomb, so that we cannot account for the empty tomb more satisfactorily on the basis of some other hypothesis. The testimony of the eyewitnesses, in other words, would compel us to conclude that the empty tomb could only be explained because Jesus rose from the dead. Secondly, according to Dr. Richardson, the event to which attestation is given would have to be in accord with the deepest understanding of life and its experience on the part of the historian. Our view of the witnesses' credibility will be determined very largely by our own attitude toward life, and hence, we are told, these two conditions are really bound up together.

Richardson then proceeds to consider the question of the attestation by reliable witnesses to the resurrection of our Lord. There were, of course, no witnesses of the actual act of resurrection and emergence from the tomb. There were, however, those who saw the risen Christ and heard and believed His words. Under the influence of the form criticism of the day, which is having such a baneful influence in New Testament studies, our author declares that the resurrection narratives at the conclusion of each of the canonical Gospels are not to be regarded as the factual accounts of eyewitnesses. Rather, these resurrection narratives are today to be regarded as the outcome of a long period of growth in the tradition. Their great importance is that they show how the sub-apostolic church presented or recited its belief in Christ's resurrection as an historical event.

At this point it is necessary to interrupt the line of Dr. Richardson's thought in order to express most decisively our dissent from this appraisal of the resurrection narratives. This is not the place in which to engage in a defense of the historicity of these narratives. The work of the late Dr. N. B. Stonehouse stands out as a mighty protest against and critique of the form-critical approach to the Gospels. If these chapters are regarded merely as witnesses to the faith of the early church, we are still faced with the question how the early church came to profess such a faith, and to this question the form critical approach has given no satisfactory

answer. We regard these resurrection narratives, found at the conclusion of each one of the four Gospels as an historical account of that which actually did transpire. They were either the work of eyewitnesses who had seen the risen Christ or of those who had had contact with such eyewitnesses.

Having rejected the Gospel accounts as unhistorical, Dr. Richardson is then led to assert that the primary evidence for the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the early Resurrection faith. It is ". . . the emergence of the faith which carried the news about Jesus far beyond the boundaries of Judea and Galilee and within a few decades had brought into being communities of people, who shared a new and distinctive quality of fellowship and life, in almost every city in the Roman world and in the lands beyond its eastern limits."² How did this faith arise, for an historical explanation of its arising must be found. This problem cannot be avoided nor shirked by the historian, for it cries aloud for a solution. What gave rise to the Easter faith? To declare that there is no explanation is to be untrue to historical method. We must ask how such a faith became alive and how the Christian Church grew and wielded such a tremendous influence in the history of the world.

To these questions, we are told, there are three lines of answer. In the first place, there is the answer of the New Testament itself. This answer is not based upon one or two isolated statements, but permeates the whole. The early faith was not faith in the teachings of Jesus but faith in the Christ who rose from the dead. Throughout the New Testament the resurrection of Jesus Christ is represented as a recent event of history. Indeed the very Christian community came into being for the express purpose of witnessing to the world that Jesus had risen from the dead. According to Dr. Richardson this is a satisfying historical account of the origin of the Christian Church and its distinctive faith. It is satisfying because it gives, he tells us, a rational historical explanation of the evidence that is available. It would seem then that the only possible interpretation of the evidence was that Christ had risen from the dead, as He said. The resurrection created the Church by calling faith into being.

On purely critical grounds alone, we are told, this is a satisfying explanation and provides a rational historical explanation of the available evidence. The question is not, however, one of interpreting the evidence on a strictly historical basis, for history is more than criticism, and there is the factor of the historian's judgment. If all other considerations apart from interpreting the evidence upon a strictly historical critical basis were ruled out, then one would have to judge (historically speaking) that the resurrection of Christ brought about the existence of the Christian Church. There are, however, interpretive concepts in the mind of the historian and these come at this point powerfully into play.

Richardson appeals to a reflection of Carl Becker, in which Becker declares that the historian, when confronted with some out-of-the-ordinary event to which attestation is made by many credible witnesses, will declare that the event is not possible and that the witnesses are self-deceived. Becker points out that this is the way we expect such historians to react, for, he says, they have their prejudices and presuppositions. They would find it easier to believe that any number of witnesses were self-deceived than to believe the strange and unusual event to which these witnesses give testimony. Richardson appreciates and accepts this estimate of the situation. "'The conflict of opinion,' from which Acton thought it necessary to rescue 'facts,' is the very stuff of history, for history in practice consists in a kind of ongoing Socratic

dialogue concerning what is the right judgment of the evidence, that is, a dialogue concerning the 'facts,'" ³

The final judgment of the historian, we are told, will, in the last analysis, depend upon the kind of man that he is. Because the historian possesses what Becker calls certain "settled convictions as to the nature of man and the world" he makes the judgments and appraisals that he does. Inasmuch as he is what he is, he judges as he does. In the writing of history detachment is an illusion.

Acts of faith, however, according to Richardson, are not determined solely by the climate of opinion of any given age, for there are always several climates of opinion and these are valid until they change. The climate of opinion found within the Christian church, for example, has its roots in the past. Men may be changed from other climates of opinion to this one; they become converted, begotten by the great mercy of God to a new and living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If then the historian is to accept the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical event he must free himself of his prejudices and preconceived ideas that such a resurrection could not have happened. Indeed, he would need to possess faith.

A second explanation of the empty tomb is that the message of the resurrection of Christ was deliberately fraudulent. To believe that the Christian church and all the blessing which it has brought into the world is based upon a deliberate fraud, is, however, impossible to accept. We always reject the greater miracle, said Hume.

The third explanation of the empty tomb is that the early Christian witnesses, even though they were sincere men, were nevertheless mistaken in what they believed. Richardson very rightly rejects any such explanation.

An Evaluation of Dr. Richardson's Position

We have set forth Dr. Richardson's position in some detail in order that we may evaluate it the more fairly. We are grateful for his rejection of certain explanations of the empty tomb, explanations which in reality do not explain. What, however, can be said about his own position? At first glance, it would seem that if this interpretation which Dr. Richardson has presented is correct, then the Bible is not really essential to Christian faith. It is true that there must be found some explanation for the faith of the early Christian church, and it is also true that the only explanation of that faith is the historical fact that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, did rise from the dead by a mighty miracle. Can we, however, say that our reason for believing in the resurrection of Christ is simply the widespread faith of the early Christian community? Before we begin to make an evaluation of this position we should notice that our information concerning the resurrection comes, on this position, simply by word of mouth. There were witnesses of the risen Christ, we may assume, and these witnesses convinced others that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. As a result, the faith in the resurrection became quite widespread. That faith has continued down to the present day and we today say that we believe in the resurrection because the Church has always so believed. We are willing, in other words, to accept the resurrection upon the testimony of early

witnesses, and we think that the only explanation of the testimony of these witnesses is that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead. Their testimony, in other words, does rest upon fact. They were not deceived.

Now this remains true whether that testimony be committed to writing or not. If these witnesses or some who had known them did write down their account of the early resurrection faith of the church, then the written accounts may be very interesting as illustrative documents, but they are not necessary to convince us of the resurrection. At the most they play rather a secondary position. We believe the resurrection, not because of the Bible, but simply because there is a testimony found in the Christian church, and this testimony was evidently quite early. If we believe that the early witnesses were trustworthy men, then we may say that this testimony goes back to those who had seen the Lord after His passion. What is all important, whether we like it or not, is the unbroken testimony of the church. Conceivably Scripture might corroborate this oral testimony, but that is really the extent of its functions. It really plays a very secondary role.

We may wish to escape this conclusion, but if the apologetic which Dr. Richardson so ably presents is true, then it simply follows that the Bible does not occupy an essential position in the church. We could really dispense with the resurrection narratives, for we have the oral reports and the resultant faith of the church. It is difficult to perceive how this conclusion can be avoided.

Is Dr. Richardson's apologetic, however, satisfactory? When we speak of the resurrection faith of the early church can we simply say that this faith must be explained and that the only way to explain it is by the assumption of an historical resurrection? If we do that, what, after all, have we accomplished? Let us suppose that shortly after the death upon the cross of our Lord, there were those who believed that they had seen the Lord again in the flesh. Let us suppose furthermore that these were honorable men; they were disillusioned and not expecting to see their Lord again. Something surely happened to change their disillusionment into joy and hope, and we firmly believe that what happened was that Christ had risen from the dead.

Now, at this point, we must press further into the matter. Suppose that Peter, for example, had thought that he saw Christ after Christ's death. He was an honest man, and, to make sure that he was not deceiving himself, would have gone to the tomb to discover whether or not it was empty. Had he found the tomb empty, he might have been convinced that Christ had appeared to him. And there would have had to be an explanation from Christ as to what had happened. In other words, there was need for special, propositional divine revelation in order that man might know the truth of what had taken place.

It cannot be too strongly pointed out that the mere fact of an empty tomb is not sufficient. The unbeliever of today is quite sophisticated, and he is likely to tell us, and he has told us, that in this strange open world all things are possible. Just as it is possible that, given enough time, monkeys playing upon the keys of a typewriter, might turn out an Encyclopaedia Britannica, so also is it possible in this world where anything can happen, that among the many strange possibilities, a man might rise from the dead. And this is something quite different from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For, let us make no mistake about the matter,

what we are concerned about is not that a man might conceivably rise from the dead, but that Jesus Christ, who is God manifested in the flesh, rose from the dead by a mighty miracle.

We cannot agree then with the manner in which Dr. Richardson has formulated the question. He speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The early church believed that Jesus rose from the dead, he says, and we must explain that faith. The best way, in fact, the only way to explain it, is to assume that it was based upon fact. But we must press further. Who is this Jesus who rose from the dead? Is He simply another one of the many sinful men who have lived upon this earth? Is He the leader about whom we really do not know too much? Is He the one whom form criticism has stripped of so much of His prerogatives? Who is this Jesus? We are not contending for the belief that someone named Jesus, the founder of the Christian church, a Jew who lived in Palestine in the first century of our era, rose from the dead. Our concern is greater than that. We are concerned rather to believe that the one who performed mighty miracles in Palestine in the first century of our era is God become man, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, the One through whom the worlds were made, who as the God-Man died upon the cross to save His people and who, having died, broke the power of death and by a mighty miracle rose from the dead and emerged from the tomb. That is the Christ whose resurrection we are concerned to believe. In his long discussion, Richardson says nothing about the Trinity, or about the Person of Christ. Indeed, he does little more than speak of the "resurrection of Christ" without really telling us who it is that is raised from the dead. We cannot remain satisfied with his formulation of the problem.

When Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He showed himself alive by "many infallible proofs." The word which Luke employs, tekmēriois, means "convincing proofs." Those who saw the risen Saviour had infallible evidence telling them that Jesus had risen. They knew who it was that suffered and who it was that rose from the dead. Without supernatural revelation, there could have been no convincing proclamation of the resurrection. The early witnesses, then, were men who saw Jesus alive after His passion, and who, because they had been divinely instructed, were convinced that He was alive. These were the men who proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Why, however, do we today accept their witness? It is at this point that we must again take our departure from what Dr. Richardson has been saying. He argues, and rightly, that the early church possessed this faith that Jesus had risen from the dead, and that the only way in which to explain this faith is that Jesus did so rise. Now, we would ask, how do we know that the early church possessed this faith? The answer is quite simple. We know it because the Bible tells us so. Even upon Dr. Richardson's position, it is really necessary to say this. Even though one apply to the Gospel narratives the drastic treatment of form criticism, it still remains true that we know of the faith of the early church only because of what the Bible tells us. Much as we might wish that we could be free of the Bible, we cannot be so. If we destroy our Bibles, we simply do not know what the early church believed.

It will not do to say, and Dr. Richardson does not say it, that we have an oral tradition which tells us about the faith of the apostolic church, for that is not the case. We do not possess such a tradition. Oral tradition is to an amazing degree based upon the Bible. Were the Bible removed, oral tradition would be something quite different from what it is. No, we cannot appeal to some oral tradition as though the written Scriptures were superfluous or unneces-

sary, for such a tradition does not exist. To learn about the faith of the early church, then, we are dependent upon the Bible. We simply cannot say that we know what the faith of the early church was unless we also acknowledge whence we have derived that knowledge, and that knowledge comes to us from the pages of Holy Scripture.

The Bible and the Resurrection Faith

If it is true that we today are dependent upon the Bible for a knowledge of the faith and practice of the apostolic church, it is well that we see what the Bible has to say upon this subject. Now, the picture given in the Scriptures is an harmonious one. The early disciples had seen the Lord Jesus after His passion. Visits to the tomb had shown that the tomb was empty, and the visitors had been told that "He is not here; He is risen as He said. Come see the place where the Lord lay." Hence, after the Holy Spirit had come upon them, as had been prophesied, the apostles went out into the world declaring their heart-felt conviction that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. The picture of Scripture is one. The apostolic church believed in the risen Lord.

Even when the most drastic criticism is applied to the Bible, one cannot escape this picture. Employ the methods of form criticism to your heart's content, you cannot do away with this picture that the early church believed in the risen Lord. And, of course, we may very well challenge the right of the critics to pick and to choose at will in their study of the Scriptures. We must approach the Bible with certain presuppositions. We believe that it is the Word of God, and believing that, we are ready to listen to the claims which it makes for itself.

The Bible and the Christian Faith

This brief survey of Dr. Richardson's approach to the resurrection will serve to bring into clearer focus what the true relation of the Bible to the Christian faith really is. We today cannot simply say that we believe in the resurrection because of the faith of the church. This does not even state the question correctly. We must first define what we mean by resurrection. The question of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can only have significance in the light of a Christian theistic framework. In the last analysis we believe that Christ rose from the dead because we have divine testimony to that fact. That is true of us, and it was true also of the original apostles who beheld the risen Lord. The mere sight of the risen Christ was in itself not sufficient. Mary saw Christ and mistook His identity. She thought that He was the gardener. There was necessary a divine revelation communicated in words to tell her Who it was that stood before her. The faith of the early church then was based not merely upon the fact that certain people had beheld Christ alive after His passion but that they had received divine revelation concerning the meaning of what had transpired. The two who walked to Emmaus received many words, indeed an entire Christology of the Old Testament, from their accompanying risen Savior.

In His great mercy toward us God has not left us who live today to depend upon garbled tradition that so easily becomes corrupted, but has given to us His written Word, in order that

we may have a true and dependable account of those great events upon which His church is founded. As the Westminster Confession says, those things which it is necessary for us to know are set down in Holy Scripture, and hence the Holy Scripture is "most necessary." If we may state the matter very simply we would say that our reason for believing in the resurrection of the Lord is the simple fact that the Bible states that He rose from the dead.

It all depends, of course, upon what kind of a book the Bible is. If it is simply a written record produced by godly men of ancient times, then we can never be sure of its statements. We can never know for certain whether what it says is to be depended upon or not. We can then employ the methods of form criticism or any other type of criticism that happens to be in vogue and dissect the Bible to our heart's content. We can set ourselves up as judges as to what is and what is not true in the Scriptures. But one thing is certain: if we regard the Bible as only a human book, we cannot have a sure word of prophecy.

If on the other hand we approach the Bible with the conviction that it is the very Word of God we shall heed earnestly its statements. We shall listen not merely to what it has to say about ourselves but also to what it has to say about itself. Realizing that our great task is that of exegesis, we shall not then try to pick and choose, to cut out and to pare down. What does the Scripture say? And in believing wonder we shall read the accounts of the resurrection. Here then is the reason why men believe the resurrection. The Bible tells us that the resurrection occurred, and because by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit we regard the Bible as the Word of God we believe what it says. It is perfectly true that in the light and against the background of the Christian theistic framework the evidence does support the testimony of Scripture. The "evidence," however, as it is popularly called, cannot be properly studied unless it first be properly interpreted in the light of the Scriptures.

At this point an objection is likely to be raised. It is often said that the Bible is the production or creation of the Church and not the producer of the Church. With this statement of the question we cannot agree. There is a certain sense in which it may be said that the Bible arose within the apostolic church, at least that the New Testament did. We may perhaps also say that the Old Testament in a certain sense arose within Israel. These statements must, however, be carefully examined.

Is it correct to say that the early church produced the New Testament or that the New Testament is a product of the early church? As these questions are thus put we feel constrained to answer them in the negative for they put the matter in an entirely false light. This is a problem the solution to which can come from the Scriptures alone. When the time for the writing of the New Testament came God chose those men whom He desired to be His human writers. We may note the case of the apostle Paul. Through long years of preparation God brought the apostle to the place where he could compose his epistles. This was not done at the direction of any church council. We never read that the apostolic church, meeting in formal session, decided that there should be an epistle to the church at Rome and commissioned the apostle Paul to write that epistle. Rather, Paul wrote for the Spirit of God had come upon him and, to use Peter's language, had "borne him." What Paul wrote then was the Word of God. Now Paul was, of course, a member of the apostolic church and in a very real sense his epistles may be said to be his own epistles, but how can it be said that the New Testament was a creation of the Apostolic Church? This claim does not do justice to what the Bible says about its own origin.

The Bible, then is not a legacy which the Apostolic Church has bequeathed to us, but is the Word of God.

Inasmuch as the Bible is the Word of God, it is to the Bible that we must go, if we are to learn what our beliefs are to be. This is the proper relationship between the Bible and our faith. The Bible tells us what our faith is to be; it tells us what the Christian religion is. It is perfectly true that all the great saving events of Christianity might have taken place without a written record of them being made. Jesus Christ might have been born of the virgin Mary, might have lived His life of sinless perfection upon this earth and died in behalf of His people. He might have risen from the dead and ascended to heaven without any record of these events having been made in writing.

Suppose, however, that that had happened. Suppose that all these saving events of redemptive history had really taken place, and then God had spoken no more to His church. What would have been the result? It is easy to imagine what the result would have been. We would have been left to oral tradition with all the error and superstition that it often carries with it. In course of time, and it would not have been a very long time, the truth concerning Jesus Christ and what He did for us would have been so encrusted with error that one would no longer know what to believe concerning Him. It is no exaggeration to say that in a very short time the truth would have become garbled; even the very name of Jesus might have been forgotten. We have only to witness the statements in the Talmud concerning Christ to see how quickly truth can become mingled with error.⁴ And how could the church possibly have defined her doctrine? When the world asked her what she believed about God, what would have been her reply? There would have been no written word to which she might turn, no sure word of prophecy to guide her deliberations and declarations. Suppose too that she were asked concerning the way of salvation, what could she reply? She would wallow in the swamp of dismay and uncertainty. Darkness would becloud her pronouncements as darkness beclouds her pronouncements now when she departs from the infallible Word of God.

Were there no Bible we really would have no message. Even though Christ had come and the saving work were accomplished, we probably would know little thereof. The church could speak with no sure voice, directing men who were in darkness to the Light of the world for the church herself would for the most part be in darkness. How could her preachers possibly get their message straight, when they would be in so great uncertainty as to what that message was?

We do not mean that a man today must first possess a correct doctrine of Scripture before he can be saved. Such is not the case at all, and it is but caricature to represent conservative Christians as holding to any such notion. A man is saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and not because he gives allegiance to a particular doctrine of Scripture. To state the matter thus is to becloud the entire issue. What is required is that a man possess saving faith, and saving faith, among other things, involves knowledge of the truth. Where, however, does a man obtain this knowledge? To ask that question is to answer it. He obtains that knowledge from the sacred Scriptures and from them alone. And this is the heart of the matter!

The Bible is the source from whence we learn what our doctrine is to be and also what our life is to be. All the thousands of Christian books and sermons which have been produced would never have come into existence were it not for the Bible. It is a very wrong and unjust thing to depreciate the Scriptures as so many are doing today. Take away the Scriptures, and those who are so insistent that Jesus Christ alone is the Word of God probably would not even know the words "Jesus Christ." Take away the Scriptures and Christianity would disappear from the earth. Let those who will call this bibliolatry. We know that it is not. We know rather that in giving us the Bible. God has given us a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, a Word to direct us on our course and to guide us to heaven.

For the Bible is "most necessary." And in saying that it is "most necessary" and in saying that it is God's Word we are also saying that it is a revelation from Him. In fact, we may safely assert that the Bible is the crowning point of God's redemptive revelation. Without the Bible we do not have the full revelation that God is pleased to give to mankind. The Bible is no mere witness to some revelation as is so often erroneously asserted today; rather the Bible itself is revelation, the Word spoken by Him that is true and pure and holy. The crowning point of all God's redemptive revelation is the Bible, the Holy Scriptures that alone are able to make one wise unto salvation.

How great a sin it is to depreciate the Word which God has so graciously given to us! May God preserve us from this sin! Rather than being ashamed of the Scriptures; rather than looking to them merely as a human book, may we emphasize what today so needs to be emphasized, the fact that they are the written revelation of the one true and eternal God. Let us never fail to remember that "the entrance of thy words giveth light."

DOCUMENTATION

1. Alan Richardson. History Sacred and Profane. Philadelphia, 1964.
2. Ibid., p. 196.
3. Ibid., p. 202.
4. Cf. R. Travers Herford. Christianity in Talmud and Midrash, London, 1903.