

XXXIV.

The Need of the New Testament Scripture.

"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book."—*Rev. xxii. 18.*



If the Church after the Ascension of Christ had been destined to live only one lifetime, and had been confined only to the land of the Jews, the holy apostles could have accomplished their task by verbal teaching. But since it was to live at least for eighteen centuries, and to be extended over the whole world, the apostles were compelled to resort to the written communication of the revelation which they had received.

If they had not written, the churches of Africa and Gaul could never have received trustworthy information; and the tradition would have lost its reliable character ages ago. The written revelation has, therefore, been the indispensable means whereby the Church, during its long and ever-extending career, has been preserved from complete degeneration and falsification.

However, from their epistles it does not appear that the apostles clearly understood this. Surely, that the Church would sojourn in this world for eighteen centuries, they did not expect; and almost all their epistles bear a local character, as tho not intended for the Church in general, but only for particular churches. And yet, altho they understood it not, the Lord Jesus knew it; He had thus planned it; hence the epistle written exclusively for the church of Rome was intended and ordained by Him, and without Paul's knowledge, to edify the Church of all ages.

Hence two things had to be done for the Church of the future:

First, the image of Christ must be received from the lips of the apostles and be committed to writing.

Secondly, the things of which Jesus had said, "Ye can not bear them now, but the Holy Spirit will declare them unto you," must be recorded. This is the postulate of the whole matter. The condition of the churches, their long duration in the future, and their world-wide extension demanded it.



And the facts show that the provision was made; but not immediately. So long as the Church was confined to a small circle, and the remembrance of Christ remained fresh and powerful, the apostles' spoken word was sufficient. The decree of the Synod of Jerusalem was probably the first written document that proceeded from them. But when the churches began to extend across the sea to Corinth and Rome, and northward to Ephesus and Galatia, then Paul began to substitute written for verbal instructions. Gradually this epistolary labor was extended and Paul's example followed. Perhaps each wrote in turn. And to these epistles were added the narratives of the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ and the Acts of the

Apostles. At last the King commanded John from heaven to write in a book the extraordinary revelation given him on Patmos.

The result was a gradually increasing number of apostolic and non-apostolic writings, probably far exceeding that contained in the New Testament. At least Paul's epistles show that he wrote many more than we now possess. But even if he had not thus informed us, the fact would have been sufficiently well established; for it is improbable that such excellent writers as Paul and John should not have written more than a dozen letters during their long and eventful lives. Even in one year they must have written more than that. The controversy of former days over the assertion that no apostolic writings could have been lost was most foolish, and showed little reckoning with real life.

It is remarkable that from this great mass a small number of writings was gradually separated. A few were collected first, then more were added, and arranged in certain order. It took a long time before there was uniformity and agreement; indeed, some writings were not universally recognized until after three centuries. But in spite of time and controversy, the sifting took place, and the result was, that the Church distinguished in this great mass of literature two distinct parts: on the one hand, this arranged set of twenty-seven books; and on the other, the remaining writings of early origin.

And when the process of sifting and separating was ended, and the Holy Spirit had borne witness, in the churches that this set of writings constituted a whole, and was, indeed, the Testament of the Lord Jesus to His Church, then the Church became conscious that it possessed a second collection of sacred books of equal authority with the first collection given to Israel; then it put the Old and the New Testament together, which unitedly form the Holy Scripture, our Bible, the Word of God.

To the question, How did the New Testament Scripture originate? we answer without hesitation, By the Holy Spirit.

How? Did He say to Paul or John: "Sit down and write"?

The gospels and the epistles do not so impress us. It does indeed apply to the Revelation of St. John, but not to the other New Testament Scriptures. They rather impress us as being written without the slightest idea of being intended for the Church of all ages. Their authors impress us as writing to certain churches of their own definite time, and that after a hundred years perhaps not a single fragment of their writings would be in existence. They were indeed conscious of the Holy Spirit's aid in *writing* the truth even as they enjoyed it in *speaking*; but that they were writing parts of the Holy Scripture, they surely knew not.

When St. Paul had finished his Epistle to the Romans, it never occurred to him that in future ages his letter would possess for millions of God's children an authority equal to, or even higher than that of the prophecies of Isaiah and the Psalms of David. Nor could the first readers of his epistle, in the church of Rome, have imagined that after eighteen centuries



the names of their principal men would still be household words in all parts of the Christian world.

But if St. Paul knew it not, surely the Holy Spirit did. As by education the Lord frequently prepares a maiden for her still unknown, future husband, so did the Holy Spirit prepare Paul, John, and Peter for their work. He directed their lives, circumstances, and conditions; He caused such thoughts, meditations, and even words to arise in their hearts as the writing of the New Testament Scripture required. And while they were writing these portions of the Holy Scripture, that one day would be the treasure of the universal Church in all ages, a fact not understood by them, but by the Holy Spirit, He so directed their thoughts as to guard them against mistakes and lead them into all truth. He foreknew what the complete New Testament Scripture ought to be, and what parts would belong to it. As an architect, by his mechanics, prepares the various parts of the building, afterward to fit them in their places, so did the Holy Spirit by different workers prepare the different parts of the New Testament, which afterward He united in a whole.

For the Lord, who by His Holy Spirit caused the preparation of these parts, is also King of the Church; He saw these parts scattered abroad; He led men to care for them, and believers to have faith in them. And, finally, by means of the men interested, He united these loose fragments, so that gradually, according to His royal decree, the New Testament originated.

Hence it was not necessary that the New Testament Scripture should contain only apostolic writings. Mark and Luke were no apostles; and the notion that these men must have written under the direction of Paul or Peter has no proof nor force. What is the benefit of writing under the direction of an apostle? That which gives divine authority to the writings of Luke is not the influence of an apostle, but that he wrote under the absolute inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Believing in the authority of the New Testament, we must acknowledge the authority of the four evangelists to be perfectly equal. As to the *contents*, Matthew's gospel may surpass that of Luke, and John's may excel the gospel of Mark; but their authority is equally unquestionable. The Epistle to the Romans has higher value than that to Philemon; but their authority is the same. As to their *persons*, John stood above Mark, and Paul above Jude; but since we depend not upon the authority of their persons, but only upon that of the Holy Spirit, these personal differences are of no account.

Hence the question is not whether the New Testament writers were apostles, but whether they were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Assuredly, it has pleased the King to connect His testimony with the apostolate; for He said: "Ye are My witnesses." Hence we know that Luke and Mark obtained their information concerning Christ from the apostles; but our guaranty for the accuracy and reliability of their statements is not the apostolic origin of the same, but the authority of the Holy Spirit. Hence the apostles are the channels through which the knowledge of these things flows to



us from Christ; but whether this knowledge reaches us through their writings or through those of others makes no difference. The vital question is, whether the bearers of the apostolic tradition were infallibly inspired or not.

Even tho a writing were indorsed by the twelve apostles, this would not be positive proof of its credibility or divine authority. For altho they had the promise that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth, this does not exclude the possibility of their falling into mistakes or even untruths. The promise did not imply absolute infallibility, at all times, but merely when they should act as *the witnesses of Jesus*. Hence the information that a document comes from the hand of an apostle is insufficient. It requires the additional information that it belongs to the things which the apostle wrote as a *witness of Jesus*.

If, therefore, the divine authority of any writing does not depend upon its apostolic character, but solely upon the authority of the Holy Spirit, it follows, as a matter of course, that the Holy Spirit is entirely free to have the apostolic testimony recorded by the apostles themselves, or by any one else; in both cases the authority of these writings is exactly the same. Personal preferences are out of the question. So far as form, content, wealth, and attractiveness are concerned, we may distinguish between John and Mark, Paul and Jude. But when it touches the question of the divine authority before which we must bow, then, we no longer take account of any such distinctions, and we ask only: Is this or that gospel *inspired by the Holy Spirit?*



XXXV.

The Character of the New Testament Scripture.

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."—*1 John i. 4.*



From the two preceding articles it is evident that the New Testament Scripture was not intended to bear the character of a notarial document. If this had been the Lord's intention we should have received something entirely different. It would have required a twofold legal evidence:

In the first place, the proof that the events narrated in the New Testament actually occurred as related.

Secondly, that the revelations received by the apostles are correctly communicated.

Both certifications should be furnished by witnesses, *e.g.*, to prove the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand would require:

1. A declaration of a number of persons, stating that they were eye-witnesses of the miracle.
2. An authentic declaration of the magistrates of the surrounding places certifying to their signatures.
3. A declaration of competent persons to prove that these witnesses were known as honest and trustworthy people, disinterested and competent to judge. Moreover, it would be necessary by proper testimony to prove that, among the five thousand, there were only seven loaves and two fishes.
4. That the increase of bread took place while Jesus broke it.

In the presence of a number of such documents, each duly authenticated and sealed, persons not too skeptical might find it possible to believe that the event had occurred as narrated in the Gospel.

To prove this one miracle would require a number of documents as voluminous as the whole of St. Matthew. If it were possible thus to prove all the events recorded in the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, then the credibility of these narratives would be properly established.

And even this would be far from satisfactory. For the difficulty would remain to prove that the epistles contain correct communications of the revelations received by the apostles. Such proof would be impossible. It would require eye- and ear-witnesses to these revelations; and a number of stenographers to report them. If this had been possible, then, we concede, there would have been, if not mathematical certainty for every expression, yet sufficient ground for accepting the general tenor of the epistles.

But when the apostles wrote them there was no audible voice. And when a voice was heard, it could not be understood, as in the case of Paul's revelation on the way to Damascus. The same may be said of what occurred on Patmos: St. John actually heard a voice, but the

