

"THE HOLY SCRIPTURES"

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1. Names for Scriptures and references thereto.
2. The Holy Spirit's use of the Truth written.
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We are pondering, beloved friends, the Holy Scriptures - a large subject. We can only fringe our subject. That is the case it seems, with all Scriptural topics. We begin with the names for Scripture, and the references thereto.

There are three names which are used. Our English word "The Bible" denotes either the book, or, more probably, the collection of little books which are bound together in the precious volume which we have. We find a stress in Scripture on the "Book of the Law" and so forth. But this name is not the usual name. The comprehensive name, as you know, is "The Writing", sometimes in the plural "The Writings", which we render "The Scriptures". More than one word is employed, there is the ordinary word "The Scriptures", and in 2 Timothy 3.15 the word is from the same root but a different ending, "The Sacred Letters", or the "Sacred Literature" if you will. Thus we have in front of us God's testimony as to "The Writing", a striking name, because it not only brings before us that this is the writing beyond all other writings, but that God has not been pleased to give us "tradition" as our centre. We look back to varied ancient religions, and we find a stress on handing down by word of mouth. We go to the Jews today, and they will tell us the oral law is quite as important as the written law. It was handed down, so they tell us, by word of mouth even long afterwards, and that remains authoritative to them. By the oral law they rule out the authority of the written law. They get rid of God's testimony. It is so important, therefore, that you and I should realize God's stress

on the written testimony. God caused it to be written that it might not only be His thoughts but His own words, to be handed down for the guidance of His people. For He does not wish that they should be in suspense. It is interesting to notice, that we have this stress on the words of the Lord. I am not sure that we have Scriptural warrant for calling the Bible "The Word of the Lord", in the same way as we often call it today. In Scripture itself the term the "Word of the Lord" seems to be used in a different way from the word "Scriptures". I quite recognise we have the words of the Lord, but the term "Word" seems to be employed in connection with the Holy Spirit's use of testimony to reach the heart. Hence I think I can enter into the thought that the Holy Spirit makes the Scriptures the "Word of the Lord" in our experience, when He causes them to sound, and we hear what the Spirit saith. But the term "word" seems to allude to the definite use of God's revelation, and not only to the fact of God's revelation. I think you will realize that in so speaking, I am not at all indicating that these are not the Words of the Lord; they are the Words of the Lord but the term "Word of the Lord" has the added thought, either in the case of the Prophet, or receiving the testimony, or in the case of the hearer, of having the application of the testimony; the application by a Living Person, the Spirit of God Himself.

We remember, moreover, the part-names which are used; "The Law of Moses", "The Prophets" and "The Psalms", says the Lord Jesus concerning the prophecies of Himself. The Law is the name given to the first five books, a word that denotes a pointing out from God, a marking of the right road. "The Prophets" were those who told beforehand, and told forth the direct testimony of God. The third section of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the "Psalms" from the name of the first book even as we put our initial for the whole name. Then it is interesting to notice the word "testimony" which is used. We remember how that the testimony was particularly connected with the ark and the commandments. But I think we shall see that it is used in a wider way. God has given His testimony in the 119th Psalm where we have various names given for God's words, - Commandments, Statutes, Precepts, Sayings, and Judgments, all of which have their force in connection with the Scriptures. As to the references thereto, what shall we say of these? In the New Testament how many are

the allusions, how many are the quotations dealing with the Old Testament, and the mode of the allusion is striking. "It hath been written", not only "it is written", but "it hath been written and remains written". Again "Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith" not only "said" but "saith". "The Holy Ghost is a witness unto us". It is by such language that the inspired writer refers back to earlier inspired writings. Again other words are united "That the Scripture might be fulfilled", and an argument is based on a single word of Scripture. That is sufficient for an argument, just as, "an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife". The inspired writers viewed one tiny testimony from the earlier Scriptures as quite decisive. And we cannot get away from the fact that they used the language in a way which shows a reverence, and which encourages the deepest reverence today. Even where difficulties are concerned, they lay stress on the inspiration. He said "And to thy seed" not "to seeds as of many, but as of one". "To thy seed, which is Christ". Again, Hebrews contains an argument built up upon the order of words, not "sacrifice and offering" but "offering and sacrifice". The inspiration of the plural or the singular, the inspiration of the order of the words. How striking is this, - even going to the extent of saying, "First being by interpretation King of Righteousness after that King of Salem which is King of Peace". The order of the words even in a name, the one which is named and the interpretation of the name, these things are regarded as important. The name could have been left out, the reference could have been left out. The Holy Spirit emphasises that the whole language was divinely arranged. And, moreover, we have the inspiration as to what is recorded and as to what was arranged for recording. The tabernacle is described and then we read, "The Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest was not made open", The Holy Ghost signifying by the type. Then again, "Melchisedec, by interpretation King of Salem". The passage goes on to say "without father, without mother" not literally, but by interpretation without father. Why? Because they are not mentioned on the pages of Scripture. The inspiration of omission. Now we have perhaps the strongest evidence of the use of Scripture we can have, the inspiration of the singular or the plural, the inspiration of omission, the inspiration of recorded type. What else can we have? Here we have all forms of a ground for a stress on verbal inspiration, for in all things

things if the inspiration be not verbal the argument breaks down. If the inspiration be only superintending inspiration the argument is faulty in every case. It is only powerful as we accept complete inspiration. Thus we have these continual references to the Scriptures, with the resting place of faith and the simple satisfaction wherever anything is in the Scriptures. "As also saith the law". So the apostle refers to Corinthians 14 "The Scripture cannot be broken" saith the Lord Jesus, a decisive matter. It was quite enough for Him. Who in reference to the attack of the enemy said "It hath been written". That was sufficient for the Lord Jesus Christ. "Ought not Christ to have suffered", "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets He made clear to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself". Moreover, the way in which the Lord Jesus referred to Moses is not only striking there, but when He was rejected He said "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life" and added "There is one that accuses you - even Moses, in whom ye trust. If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?" The Lord linked the two together and He recorded with approval that when Abraham was approached as to some further difficulties the answer was "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them. If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead". A greater stress on Moses could not be imagined. When we find that Christ's invariable weapon in the wilderness was the Word of God through Moses, that His resurrection witness began at Moses on both occasions, we have it especially brought before us, that He declared acceptance of His own words was linked with acceptance of Moses, and that His argument was that if Moses and the Prophets were not accepted no further evidence could reach or change a man. Here we have then, in the very warp and woof of the Scripture, a simplicity of confidence in the Scripture. It is important for us to recognise this "atmosphere" of the truth, because I am convinced normal characteristics and standpoint are impressive even beyond a few statements. In like manner the atmosphere of upbringing affects a person far more than he realizes and the atmosphere of our spiritual upbringing goes far beyond a few statements in a philosophical way. We need to be those who abide in the Scriptures and dwell in the reverential aspect of continually resting with the simplicity of

faith on the Lord of the Words and the Words of the Lord. We need to become so used to accepting the Scriptures, and so satisfied with everything they say, and so willing to apply with a readiness of faith's simplicity, that the power of a recorded testimony comes with continual and increasing freshness and force in our daily experience and progress. It is only as there is the atmosphere of the authority of Scripture recognised that we can hope to have the true understanding of that which God has caused to be written.

We come now to the thought of the preservation of the truth. This is an interesting topic. How has God preserved to us the words of Scripture? First we will speak of rejected or lost books; afterwards of "How has God preserved to us the Scriptures?" We need to recognise at the outset the writings were not for the most part by wealthy men. The believers were those who lost something for their Lord. Yet, whereas we find some of the famous books of antiquity are lost altogether, these epistles written by men who were far less famous in that day have been graciously preserved. It is an interesting thought; interesting in another way. Classical books which have been preserved, works of the famous writers of antiquity whose names have been handed down as writing volumes of excellence in their language; these writings depend on how many manuscripts? Contrast the few manuscripts of the great writers of secular antiquity, with the many manuscripts of Scripture. Even if their works have been preserved, they have only just been preserved. Here we have brought before us that there was a living application in the hearts of some old time saints, so that they wanted the Scriptures, and their following of them is very different from the intellectual interest which men had in the classical works of those days. The classical writers were copied, doubtless they were popular, men delighted to have them; and I suppose that comparatively many copies were made and sumptuous copies, and yet they are not preserved in the same way as the Scriptures are, because affections come into the matter of Scripture, and God used affection for the truth to hand us down the manuscripts. Thus He employed the love of His people and a concern of the people to be the means of bringing us down the manuscripts from ancient times. Furthermore, the manuscripts that we have are from various parts. You may say, what is that as a witness? 'Tis not only interesting with regard to the spread of the truth, but important

in another way, with regard to the evidence of accuracy. And further, there were the old quotations from the Scriptures in their ancient writings, and beyond this we have ancient translations going back as far as the second and third centuries. It is interesting to see this, because a man will sometimes come along and say, "Your gospels were not written until such and such a date". "Well" we can answer him, "it is very curious that translations of them were made before they were written, - very curious". And God has used the quotations of the translations to give collateral evidence, for we have the interesting fact of manuscripts, translations, quotations, and even of opponents' testimony - all handed down. Now to have all these falsified would be a tremendous miracle. If as some critics would affirm at our street corners, there has been a falsifying, they are demanding too much from our credulity. It often seems to me that those who oppose the truth ask too much credulity from us. They make strains upon faith which faith could not bear. It would be impossible to believe that all these things have been changed. There is not time to have changed them, there is not opportunity to have changed them. The different parts of translations, and so forth, in different lands made the problem greater. But yet I grant there are certain difficulties which come in; difficulties which sometimes frighten dear children of God. They are told for example, that there are many various readings, various readings in the ancient manuscripts, and how can we know what was the truth? I think this objection is somewhat similar to the objection which has been raised. We often meet it at the street corner "You are always altering your Bible, altering the translations; always altering it". Those who raise this objection seem to have no idea that if there is respect for the original, the altering of the translation is part of that very respect. They seem to think we are altering the Scriptures; instead of going back to a more accurate rendering of the Scriptures in intention. I grant man's efforts often fail, many translations are the reverse of beneficial. But the intention is, often, more fidelity to the original. And the same thought rises up with respect to manuscripts. What if there are many deviations in the manuscripts! Personally I cannot say I regret this fact. Let me put it frankly to you. It seems to me that God has been pleased to give a similarity in all His un-

veilings and that He has shown to us that whatever is committed to men, men fail to keep perfectly. Therefore I am not surprised that there are many humbling reminders in the fact that the manuscripts do vary, and that from these variations we are not only led to humility, but to more careful study, to see if we can find out what were the original words. The manuscript deviations, furthermore, seem helpful in another way, because these variations have limits. If there were no variations at all, there might be a suspicious collusion. Everything might be made to fit together and to work together by a scheming and one would say after all, "perhaps these manuscripts were all made from the same copy". But the very deviations which are found are just what we would expect if the Scriptures were widely circulated in a way that would prevent deviations beyond those which remain handed down - if you follow what I mean. Widespread circulation, and a large number of minor deviations will become one of the strongest witnesses that there are no deviations more than those which are handed down. The limits of the deviations afford one of the strongest testimonies that we have, by the widespread circulation and the widespread manner of the deviations which we have presented to us. Hence you tell me that there is one word in a hundred as to which you are not quite sure. I say "Well, I am very thankful you have given such a testimony to ninety words out of a hundred". There are some who think this deviation in manuscripts invalidates verbal inspiration. They say, "What is the test of verbal inspiration, if you are not sure of every word because the manuscripts vary?" Surely every child of God can see the difference between saying I am not sure of a single word, I am sure of ninety nine, and not sure about one. Surely there is a vast difference. And what are the deviations in some cases. Personally I find very little difference as to my faith, when the deviation is the spelling of a word. I will not say that all the deviations are as small as this matter. But suppose we had the word "honour" and "honor", there is a manuscript deviation to be recorded, but I do not think you will regard that as a great difference. Hence when people multiply a number of manuscript deviations, they are dealing with numbers, not with the character of those deviations. Granted that there are a certain few places as to which we cannot be sure what was the original Scripture - there are just a few verses. What do we do? Our simple position is this. We say there may be twenty verses, or there may be a word here and a

word there and a word somewhere else as to which we are not sure - was it in the original Scripture? We cannot say. Humbled, we build our faith on every other word, and leave the few words, as to which we do not know for certain. Let me put it in the concrete. I rejoice that baptism is the confession of faith, but I cannot be convinced that in Acts 8.37 the words to the eunuch concerning baptism are in the original manuscript. You will recollect the simple expression it contains which is interesting to us. "But Philip said, If thou believest with thine heart thou mayest, and the eunuch answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". Personally I doubt if that was in the original manuscripts. I think it was a marginal note made by some who were interested, perhaps from what he heard, and the next writer copied it into the original text. Remember they were not printed books but written books. You mark your Bibles, may be. It was easy for marginal notes to be copied, and that took place on several occasions, but the number of manuscripts enable us to find out just where these deviations are. It is the same in 1 John 5. "There are three that bear witness in heaven", apparently is a marginal note, it is not in the oldest manuscripts and does not quite fit the context. "The three that bear witness on earth" is the thought of the original Scripture. There are just a few verses which are so found. But the number of manuscripts, let me just remind you, enables us to detect this error, and a thoughtful believer would say, if he finds one word as to which he cannot say if it is in the original manuscript, "I cannot build on this".

But it is no evidence against another word. I think you will realize that in copying manuscripts by hand it is marvellous we have this proportion as we have it. Let me give you a piece of dictation in this meeting room, and your manuscripts will not agree. Let me examine them all. You will not all make the same mistakes, and by your varied mistakes I shall find out what was the original word. Your very mistakes, being divergent, will help me to find out. This will give a sidelight upon the original manuscripts of the Scriptures.

We pass next to ponder very briefly the canon of Scripture. I think believers have a restfulness as to the canon of the Old Testament because it is preserved in the Hebrew

Scriptures down to this day. To the Israelites were committed the oracles of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ indicated the books which they possessed and incorporated when He referred in Luke 24 to the divisions of the Scriptures which remain to this very day. The Apochrypha was not incorporated in the Hebrew Scriptures; it was found linked with certain translations, but even then not authoritatively accepted as part of the Scripture many, many years after the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently if we say what were the Hebrew Scriptures to which Christ referred, the canon is settled as to the removal of the Apochrypha; to say nothing of the internal evidence, and the errors which rule themselves out. With respect to the later Scriptures we may find a measure of problem at least theoretically. We may take the general thought that God would graciously look after His own books and arrange what He wanted to be preserved of His Scriptures; that He will hear prayer and guide them. But we may take a parallel of reasoning that as He looked after in the olden time, surely He would not fail in the present dispensation. We may realize that books were promised, that inspiration was promised, and that books have their evident apostolic authorship, and that they claim to be the words of God. There remain a few books as to which some may have difficulties, though not doubts. For example, some of the shorter epistles were not so well known, not so frequently copied in the earlier centuries, hence they were not quoted by the earlier writers as being the inspired words of God. I refer for example, to the 2 Peter and Jude; and; as most of you know, the book of Revelation, with its testimony against Satan, has been far less copied than other books of Scripture. Whereas there are plenty of copies of the gospels there are few of the book of Revelation, far fewer. The objections that we have at the street corner are very poor, for example, that the canon was not settled till the time of a council, and that by a kind of human chance guesswork or casting of lots a decision was made. That theory may be put aside as belonging to the street corner only. But the believer does realise that when he is asked to give earlier references, for example as to the epistle of the 2 Peter, it is not so easy. The little books of that character were not so much circulated. The christians were not wealthy, they were not paying for large editions, they did not have printers in those days, there were real problems, and these little epistles were not circulated in

the same way. But we find that fairly early God granted testimony as to their origin, and then we have the further suggested evidence of the books that are handed down to us today. I think we rightly have them compared with other Scriptures. We wish prayerfully to see; Is there a oneness of accord between them? Is there no deviation? And there is a contrary kind of evidence; - Are other earlier books written by other writers, of a different character altogether. If we find the books handed down and incorporated in the New Testament have not only early witness as to their authorship, but for the most part a large number of manuscript evidences, and further, if we find a unity of witness, and cannot discover after intense prayerful study any deviation from the truth or deviation from one another among themselves, and, again, when we realise other writings of early centuries are on a different level altogether, so that one should feel pained by them, what is the only possible inference? We are compelled to realise God has fulfilled in the present dispensation that which He arranged in the old, and given to us the books as a united whole.

Some have a problem of 'lost' books. Personally I cannot say that I have any problem in this matter. I regard many inspired books as lost. People may say that is a strange statement to make, but is it at all, a difficulty when you acknowledge one fact; the Lord Jesus spake words of perfect wisdom without mistake. Yet all His words are not handed down. Therefore if His words have been lost, is it surprising that other words, spoken or written by the Holy Spirit's testimony, have been lost? Let me now insert inverted commas around the word "lost". Nothing is lost from God's standpoint. It is, however, not a question of being lost, but God has been pleased just to hand down that which He intended for our uses. They are lost to us because they are not handed down to us. That is the simplicity of the answer. Some dear children of God have thought that every book that was inspired must be handed down to us, or that there is a difficulty. I would ask, must every word that Christ spoke be handed down, or there is difficulty? The Scripture declares Christ's words could not be fully written. All the world would not contain the books which should have been written, and, beloved friends, if we were to have all the words of the Holy

Spirit handed down to us, we should never read our Bibles through. God has been pleased to give us that which is sufficient for our need and our condition. Can we not accept His wisdom?

Tradition is an interesting subject. The apostle speaks of the traditions that they receive from him; the things that were handed down. Now it is worthy of notice that the Holy Spirit approves of godly tradition handed down, and godly parents should have traditions in their home, and hand down the truth. There should be tradition, but tradition is not in itself a resting place. That is the important matter. Have you any objection to tradition? I have not. I have objection to many traditions, but not to tradition. I test all the traditions, and if any do not agree with the Scripture I object to them, and I do not object to the fact of tradition. I think there should be a good deal of tradition handed down, for one should seek to hand down that which he has received from other people. The point is, are they in accord with that which is written. If so, accept them; if not reject them. Our objection is when men come forward and bring traditions to overthrow the written words, or, without sufficient evidence, they bring forward their traditions. We have seen men who have traditions which overthrow the words of God, and they want us to accept these as authoritative. We reply - "You have brought before us some traditions which overthrow the words of God. Those traditions which you add to the words of God we are more than slow to accept, when you have already shown us the character of their companion traditions". You bring me a man who tells two lies, and if he gives me a third statement, I am not so prepared to accept it, whatever the statement. I know there are people who tell us in connection with the Scripture, the Scripture was not written to give science or other information, and therefore we cannot be surprised if there are difficulties on this point. Such a theory is totally out of place. In other words they want me to believe, that if, when I can test the Scriptures, I find it wrong, and when I cannot test it, I must accept it. But rather we have the encouraging thought that, whenever we test the Scripture we find it right. Human science falters before it, and thus we have the encouragement that God has given a book, which, though not given to teach science, never teaches anything against true science. Thus,

wherever men can test it they find it true, and where they cannot test it faith rests. Contrastedly with other earlier books and traditions, wherever we can test them we often find them wrong. One is so delighted with the Scripture distinction.

A word as to the church and the Bible. I put the word "church" in italics. Personally I cannot accept the statement - "the early church". I regard only one church as existing in the book of Acts. I should hesitate to speak of church history after Acts 28. I would speak of Christendom's history, but I doubt if we have Scripture warrant for calling it "church history" after Acts 28. However, we know the theory that Romanism would ever bring forward, the Church gave us our Bible. Does this give any authority to those who set it forth. Surely that would prove too much from their standpoint. Judaism gave us the Old Testament; therefore, will they accept Judaism? The remarkable fact is this; that to the Jews are committed the oracles of God which they handed down; a witness against themselves. And to Christendom was entrusted the later Scriptures which they handed down, a witness against themselves. The parallel is remarkable, and shows God's wondrous overruling, for the witness against all the developements of evil is contained in the same Scriptures that were handed down by those who were developing the evils prophesied. One cannot but praise God for His overruling.

Translation to the glory of God, presents a problem which I think should always awaken the prayers of God's people. I always hesitate to draw any dear believers back from loving confidence in the Bible they read. Give me the simple hearted old cottager who only spells out his English Bible slowly but who loves the Lord Who wrote it, and I should be very sorry to give him a learned argument on the defects of the translation; - more than sorry. But on the other hand, I must say I feel a keen regret when some with a certain amount of assertiveness come forward and argue over errors from a translation they use, and if one attempts to refer gently to the fact that the Holy Spirit gave the Scripture in Greek and Hebrew, they say, "We do not want you to go away from the Bible, stick to the Bible" and so forth. One does feel that those who come forward claiming to be teachers, emphasizing errors, and then refusing to

go back to the Hebrew and Greek, are putting themselves in a wrong position altogether. And though a plain witness must be given that no translation can ever fully render the Greek and the Hebrew Scriptures, we thank God for translations, yet must look beyond them to Him and His original words. In general, the use by the Holy Spirit of the Septuagint wherever it could be used, would show us that we should use the normal translation where we can, and alter it where it is unsatisfactory, the method that some of us have sought to adopt. Translation cannot claim to be the original words; it claims to represent as far as possible the words. A very easy thing it may seem at first, but not so easy if you try. For every word in every language has certain thoughts by derivation, and certain further thoughts by usage. For example, the word 'surgeon' originally was, working with the hand, but you would think it very strange if we were to speak about those who are engaged in a dock-yard that they are all surgeons, because the word has now by usage a different meaning. A lawyer has his "practice". The word "practice" in another context has quite a different meaning. Usage and context will decide. Not every language grows in exactly the same way as the language with which we are acquainted. Every language has its own mode of growth, and even in word for word translation there can only be circles that cut one another. You cannot often get a word in two languages with concentric circles. The circles cut one another. The words contain some of the same thoughts but only some. This is important, and suggests that there may be some remedy in the reverse process of translation. "Translate" more often the person into the book instead of the book into the language of the person. In other words, let the translating be of you. I do not mean only in Greek and Hebrew, though that may be very useful, but you and I must get into the very atmosphere of the Scriptures. And this is the reason why sometimes an old cottager knows a great deal more than the learned professor who is qualified in these two languages and other languages from the standpoint of the critic, but has never lived in the atmosphere of the Scriptures. In other words, the scholar is able to translate the words, he is a walking lexicon, but the saint is a believer who breathes the atmosphere of the Holy Spirit. and as such he has been translated. This is of deepest importance, because we should be translated into the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures, in our experience of the words

of Truth. Let the translation be more and more on your side, that is, that you may get more and more back to the words, and the testimony the Holy Spirit gave. I could say much more about translation; it is a peculiarly interesting subject. The errors of translation, designed errors in some cases, unconscious errors in others; added words, these are all important subjects. Our translators in English have wisely told us where they added words by putting in italics. This is an unusual method of printing, but very wise. It helps us for example in the passage "broken down the middle wall of partition between us". "Between us" spoils the context. Many italics need to be removed to get back to the original, so that if the believer seeks to get into the atmosphere of Scripture and realizes that every translation may contain errors, I think he will find that for practical purposes the difficulties which I have alluded to are not so great as another difficulty. What I mean is this; if you were Greek by birth, if you knew all the language, if you had lived in the days of the apostles or there was no difficulty of manuscripts being handed down, remember this, that unless your heart were in harmony with the Lord, by the time the words reached you the effect of your heart and mind on the words would quite change their force - far more than errors in manuscripts can change them; far more than the errors of translation would change them. We know very well that two elements meeting together will often-times have the remarkable result that the first element is changed altogether in the double compound. A heart out of harmony with the Lord if it lived in the days of the apostles would have done more harm to the words than those who understand them far more after these many years. The primary thing is communion with God. Oh, beloved friends, however this education may be useful, microscopic study of manuscript may be useful, but the primary ends are spiritual, and the Holy Spirit is not dead, He is a witness to us. And if He indwells believers He is able to hand to them the written words with living power, and apply them to the people of God.

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