

The Fundamentals

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THE FUNDAMENTALS

VOLUME III

CHAPTER I

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE—DEFINITION, EXTENT AND PROOF

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In this paper the authenticity and credibility of the Bible are assumed, by which is meant (1), that its books were written by the authors to whom they are ascribed, and that their contents are in all material points as when they came from their hands; and (2), that those contents are worthy of entire acceptance as to their statements of fact. Were there need to prove these assumptions, the evidence is abundant, and abler pens have dealt with it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that because these things are assumed their relative importance is undervalued. On the contrary, they underlie inspiration, and, as President Patton says, come in on the ground floor. They have to do with the historicity of the Bible, which for us just now is the basis of its authority. Nothing can be settled until this is settled, but admitting its settlement which, all things considered, we now may be permitted to do, what can be of deeper interest than the question as to how far that authority extends?

This is the inspiration question, and while so many have taken in hand to discuss the others, may not one be at liberty to discuss this? It is an old question, so old, indeed, as again in the usual recurrence of thought to have become new. Our

CHAPTER III

GOD IN CHRIST THE ONLY REVELATION OF THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

BY ROBERT E. SPEER

"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God. And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor me." (John 16:2, 3.)

These words suggest to us that it is not enough for a man just to believe in God. Everything depends on what kind of a god it is in whom he believes. It is a rather striking and surprising comparison at first that our Lord institutes here between a mere belief in God and the possibly horrible moral consequences, on the one hand, and a knowledge of God in Christ and its sure moral effects, on the other. And the lesson would seem to be the inadequacy of any religious faith that does not recognize the revelation of the Father in Jesus Christ and that does not know Jesus Christ as God. It is a little hard for us to take such a great thought as this into our lives, and yet our Lord puts it in unmistakable clearness: on the one hand, the moral inadequacy of a mere belief in God; on the other hand, the moral and spiritual adequacy of a recognition of God as Father exposed in Christ as God.

THEISM NOT SUFFICIENT

In the former of these two verses our Lord makes the first of these two points unmistakably clear. He saw no adequate guarantee of moral rectitude and justice in a mere theistic faith. He suffered in His own death the possibly bitter fruits of a mere theistic faith. The men who put Him to death were ardent believers in God, and they thought they

were doing a fine thing for God when they crucified the Son of God. And He told His disciples that the day would come when conscientious men would take out service of God in executing them, and that those who would put them to death would not be bad men, but men who thought that by killing them they were doing God's will.

We see exactly the same great error in our own day. It is no sufficient protection to a man to believe in one God. There are no more rigid monotheists in the world than Mohammedans, and there are some who tell us that in India the moral conditions of the Mohammedans are even worse than the moral conditions of the polytheistic Hindus around about them. It is not so much a matter of how many gods you believe in. I would rather believe in three good gods than in one bad one. One religion is superior to another religion, not because it has less or more gods than that other religion, but because the character of its gods is superior to the character of the gods of that other religion. Our Lord understood completely that a mere faith in God was not going to make a good man, that a man might believe in God and be a murderer, or an adulterer, he might believe in God and put the very apostles of Jesus Christ to death and think that thus he was doing God a great service.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS NOT SUFFICIENT

It seems to me that it is worth while to stop here for a moment incidentally to note how easy a thing it is for a man to be guilty of conscientious error and crime. It is no defense of a man's conduct to say that he is conscientiously satisfied with what he did. I suppose that most bad things have been done in all good conscience, and that most of the sins that we commit today we commit with a perfectly clean conscience. There is such a thing as a moral color-blindness that is just as real as a physical color-blindness. I was visiting a little while ago one of our well-known girls' schools, and had

a discussion with one of the teachers, who said that she thought it did not make so much difference what a pupil believed or did, provided only she was conscientious in her belief and conduct. I told her that it must be quite easy to go to school to her if it did not matter whether you answered right or not, if only you were conscientiously honest in what you said. She might get two absolutely contrary answers to a question and mark each one of them perfect. The whole foundations of the moral universe fall out from beneath the man or the woman who will take that view of it, that there is not really any objective standard of right or wrong at all, that everything hinges on just how a person feels about it, and if they only feel comfortable over the thing it is all right. These men who were going to put the disciples of Jesus Christ to death had no qualms of conscience about it. They would think in doing it that they were doing God a service. The idea that our Lord means to bring out is this, that the standards of a man are dependent upon his conception of God, and He saw no guarantee of moral rectitude and justice in a man's life except as that man grasped the revelation of God as Father that had been made in Jesus Christ, and himself knew Jesus Christ as God.

CHRIST'S MENTION OF "FATHER"

There is no room here to trace this great thought through all the teaching of our Lord, but it would be a good and helpful thing if many of us would take the four Gospels and sit down with two sheets of paper, and write down on one sheet everything that Jesus had to say about *the Father*, and on the other every mention in Christ's teaching of the name of *God*. Late-ly, I read through the last discourses of Jesus in John with this in mind. Only four times does Jesus so much as mention the name of God, while He speaks of the Father at least forty times. Evidently our Lord conceived that His great message to men was a message of God as Father revealed in

His own life, and He conceived this to be a great practical moral truth, that was to save men from those errors of judgment, of act and of character about which a man has no sure guarantee under a mere monotheistic faith.

IN RELATION TO OUR RELIGIOUS FAITH

1. I think we might just as well now go right to the heart of the thing by considering, first of all, THE RELATIONSHIP OF THIS REVELATION THAT JESUS CHRIST MADE OF THE FATHER-CHARACTER OF GOD IN HIMSELF TO OUR OWN RELIGIOUS FAITH. We begin our Christian creed with the declaration, "I believe in God the Father Almighty." I believe that no man can say those words sincerely and honestly, with an intellectual understanding of what he is saying, who is not saying them with his feet solidly resting on the evangelical conviction; for we know practically nothing about God *as* Father except what we learn from the revelation of God as Father in Jesus Christ. Men say sometimes that the idea of God as Father was in the Old Testament, and there is a sense doubtless in which we can find it there: a patriotic sense for one thing, a poetic sense for another thing. The Hebrews thought of God as the Father, the national Father of Israel.

Now and then there is some splendid burst in the prophets that contains that idea, as when Jeremiah, crying out for God, says, "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born." Or when Israel is itself crying out through Isaiah, "Jehovah is our Father. He is the potter and we are the clay." But in each sense it is a sort of nationalistic conception of God as the Father of the whole people Israel. And even when the note comes out poetically, it is patriotic still. Turn some time to the 103rd Psalm, where there is the best expression of it, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him," and even there it is the national cry. Or turn to the 89th Psalm, and there, too, it is national and patriotic: "And he shall cry unto me, Jehovah,

thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation." And if in all the great body of the religious poetry of Israel there are only two or three distinct notes of the fatherhood of God, we cannot believe that that idea filled any very large place in the heart of Israel. And in the very last of all the Old Testament prophecies, the complaint of God is just this, that the Israelites would not conceive of Him as their Father, and that even the political conception of God as the Father of the nation was no reality in the experience of the people.

A NEW CONCEPTION

The revelation of God as the Father of men was a practically new conception exposed in the teaching and in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ—not in His teaching alone. We should never have known God as Father by the message of Jesus Christ only; we should never have been able to conceive what Christ's idea of God was if we had not seen that idea worked out in the very person of Jesus Christ Himself. It was not alone that He told us what God was. He said that when He walked before men, He was Himself one with the Father on Whom the eyes of men might gaze: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father; but by me. If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also; from henceforth ye have known Him and have seen Him. Philip saith unto Him, Lord show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus said unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth His works."

JOHN AND MATTHEW

We cannot separate the Christological elements of the Gospel from the Gospel. The effort is made by throwing the

Gospel of John out of court, and then we are told that with the Gospel of John gone the real work of Christ was just in His message, making known the Father to men, and that the Christological character that we impose upon the Gospel was something foisted upon it later, and not something lying in the mind and thought of Jesus Christ Himself. But I do not see how men can take that view of it until they cut out also the 11th chapter of Matthew. Christ sets forth there the essentially Christological character of His gospel just as unmistakably as it is set forth anywhere in the Gospel of John: "No man knoweth the Son save the Father; and no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." What I mean is just this, that the only defense of the Unitarian position is a ripping of the Gospel apart so that you cannot recognize it as the Gospel any more. You cannot tear Christ's revelation of the fatherhood of God away from the person of Christ. He did not expose the fatherhood of God by what He said; He exposed the fatherhood of God by what He was; and it is a species of intellectual misconception to take certain words of His and say those words entitle us to believe in God as our Father, while we reject Jesus Christ as His Divine Son, and think that it is possible to hold to the first article of our Christian creed without going on to the second article of it, "And I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

CHRIST IS ALL

If you and I subtract from our conception of God what we owe to the person of Jesus Christ, we have practically nothing left. The disciples knew that they would have little left. When it was proposed that they should separate themselves from Christ and the revelation that He was making, these men stood absolutely dumbfounded. "Why, Lord," they said, "what is to become of us? We have no place to go. Thou hast the words of eternal life. There is nothing for us in

Judaism any more." Monotheism was in Judaism; the revelation of God was in Judaism; but that was nothing to the disciples now that they had seen that glorious vision of His Father made known to men in Jesus Christ His Son. It would seem to follow that our attitude towards Jesus Christ is determinative of our life in the Father, and that the imagination that we have a life in the Father that rests on a rejection of the claims of Jesus Christ is an imagination with no foundations under it at all. Take those great words of our Lord: "He that loveth me not keepeth not my words; and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me. If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." All through these last discourses of Jesus you come upon the two terms, "word" and "words." In the Greek they are not just the singular and the plural of the same word. The word that is translated "word" here is the same word that in the beginning of this Gospel is translated "word," *logos*, which does not mean the utterances of Jesus, which does not mean the things that Jesus said, which does not mean the ideals of life that Jesus erected. We are not complying with that condition when we try to be kind and unselfish and to obey the Golden Rule. What Jesus is setting forth there as the condition of a right attitude toward God is a man's acceptance of the inner secret of His own life, a man's deliberate committing of himself to the great principles that underlie the character and the person of Jesus, a sympathetic union with Himself. And He summed it all up in those words to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It is in this sense, I say, that you and I cannot honestly declare that we "believe in God the Father" unless we go right on to say, "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord," for we know practically nothing about God as Father except what was revealed of God as Father in Him Who said, "I and the Father are one." Do we believe in the fatherhood of God in that sense?

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

2. Perhaps we can answer that question better by going on to ask, in the second place, whether we are REALIZING IN OUR LIVES ALL THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS REVELATION OF THE FATHER-CHARACTER OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST. For one thing, think how it *interprets the mystery and the testing of life*. Now life is simply an enigma on the merely theistic hypothesis. We get absolutely no comfort, no light, no illumination upon what we know to be the great problem of life from a simple belief in God. It only becomes intelligible to us as we understand God to be our Father in the sense in which Jesus Christ revealed Him. Dr. Babcock used to put it in the simple phrase: "You have got to take one of two interpretations of it. You have got to read your life in the terms of fate, or you have got to read it in the terms of fatherhood." Once I accept the revelation of God made in Jesus Christ, my life is still a hard problem to me. There are many things in it that are terribly confused and difficult still; but I begin to get a little light on its deep and impenetrable mysteries. It was just in this point of view that the writer of the great epistle to the Hebrews thought he had some clue to the mystery of his own life, to the chastening of it, to the hard and burning discipline through which he sees we are all passing. It was only when he conceived of himself as being a son of the great Potter Who was shaping the clay Himself that the mystery began to clear a little from his pathway. And it was just so, you remember, that Christ got light on the mystery of His life: "Father, not my will, but thine be done." Only as He remembered and rested deeply upon the character of God as His Father did those great experiences through which He was passing have full intelligibility to Him. After all, it was no fancy that connected the two great ideas of Isaiah, the living idea of the fatherhood of God and the metaphorical idea of God as the Potter shaping his clay. It is only

so that we understand both aspects of our human life. We turn to Rabbi Ben Ezra and see the mystery wrought out there:

“He fixed thee mid this dance

Of plastic circumstance,

This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:

Machinery just meant

To give thy soul its bent.

Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.” When the wheel moves fast, and the hand of the Potter seems cruel upon the clay, and the friction is full of terrible heat, we begin to understand something of it all in realizing that the Potter’s hand is the hand of a Father shaping in fatherly discipline the life of His son. “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons.”

OUR IDEALS

Or think, in the second place, how this conception of God *inspires and rectifies the ideals of our lives*. It was this that suggested the idea to Jesus here. He saw that there was absolutely no guarantee of right standards of life in a mere theistic faith, and there are none. We cannot morally trust Unitarianism if we take it away from living contact with the evangelical tradition. There is too much loose, subjective caprice in it; there is not enough firm and unassailable anchorage in the objective realities of a revelation of the character of God made known to us in His divine Son. We have no guarantee whatever of just and perfect moral ideals that we do not get from the exposure of the father-character of God in the person of Jesus Christ and from personal union with God in Him.

As a simple matter of fact the best ideals of our life we all owe to just that revelation. The ideal of purity—the Jews never had it. They had an ideal of ritual cleanliness, but they had no Christian ideal of moral purity. You cannot find

the ideal of purity anywhere in the world where the conception of the father-revelation of God in Christ has not gone. Explain it as you will, it is a simple fact of comparative religion. Can any man find the full ideal of moral purity anywhere in this world where it has not been created by the revelation of the father-character of God in Christ? We owe it to that, and we can not be sure of its perpetuation save where the conviction of that great revelation abides in the faith of man.

Or take our ideal of work. Where did Christ get His ideal of work? "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." On what ground did He rest His claim upon men to work? "Son, go work today in my vineyard." Our whole ideal of a workingman's life, of a man's using his life to the fullness of its power in an unselfish service is an ideal born of the revelation of the father-character of God in Christ. And forgiveness is an ideal of the same kind. We owe all the highest and noblest ideals of our life to that revelation. And it seems to us something less than fair for a man to take those ideals and then deny their origin, trampling under foot the claims of Him from Whom those ideals came into our lives.

SWEETENS OBEDIENCE

And think *how rational and sweet this conception of God makes obedience*. There is something rational but hardly sweet in the thought of obedience to Him under the simple theistic conception. All the joy of obedience comes when I think of myself as my Father's son and sent to do my Father's will. Our Lord thought of His life just so. "Simon," He said—that last night that Simon tried to defend Him by force—"put up thy sword into its sheath. The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" We get our ideals of obedience and the joy and the delight of obedience from the thought that after all we are simply to obey our Father. In the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John, we get a little vision of what Christ conceives to be the sweetness and the tender-

ness and the beauty that can come into life from a real acceptance of this revealing of His. "In that day," He says, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him. If a man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."

I remember an interview I had some years ago at Asheville. As we sat under the trees, the man with whom I was talking told me he had had a home; he was sure it was the sweetest home that could be found in all the Southern States; and he did not have it any more. The eye that had marked his coming and brightened when he came watched for him no more, and little arms that had been thrown around his neck, and that made his home-coming in the evening a very taste of heaven to him, were no longer there to greet him, nor any little voice to call to him as he came. And he told me that when first that great eclipse fell upon his life it seemed to him that the whole thing was done and that a man was not warranted in trying to live any more. But he found here in this 14th chapter of John these great assurances of which I have just been speaking, that there was another eye that could take the place of that eye that had waited in the years that had passed, other arms that could take the place of those little arms that were now busy with the other children round about the throne of God in heaven. There had come back into life the tenderness—and mark you, that too is a thought that came when Jesus Christ revealed the Father in Himself—there had come back into his life the tenderness and the joy and the gentleness that he had known before, simply because now he had come a little more fully to realize what it was that Jesus Christ by His life and teachings had exposed for the life of man.

COURAGE AND HOPE

And what *new courage and hope* it brings into a man's life. You say to me, "Man, you have got to be like God," and I reply, "Take your preposterous blasphemy away. To be like God?" But you say to me, "He is your own Father, and you are His son. We are not asking you to become like that to which you are essentially unlike; we are simply asking you to become like your Father. It is His own nature in you that He will develop until restored to its full relationship to Him from Whom it came." You talk to us that way about our duty as men in the world, and it makes all the difference between death and life to us. If God the Father did not come near to men in Jesus Christ, I do not know what I am going to do; I do not know where to find the help that I know I need. Nowhere else in the world has any voice arisen to offer it to men. But if God came near men in Jesus Christ and thereby guaranteed our own kinship to Him, I may believe that I can become like Him Whose son I am. It is on just this ground that St. Paul makes his appeal: "Be ye therefore imitators of God *as dear children.*"

RELATION TO PRAYER LIFE

3. And, last of all, think on THE LIGHT THAT THIS CONCEPTION OF GOD THROWS UPON OUR LIFE OF PRAYER. I suspect that prayer has been just a sham to many of us, or a thing that we have done because other people told us it was the thing to do. We never got anything out of it; it never meant anything to us. We might just as well have talked to stone walls as to pray the way we have prayed. We went out and said, "God," and we might just as well have said, "hills," or "mountains," or "trees," or anything else. Why have we not gone into the school of Christ and learned there, alike from His practice and His doctrine, what real prayer is and how a man can do it. You cannot find a single prayer of Christ addressed to God, not one; nor can you find a single

prayer of Christ's in which He so much as mentions God. The third verse of the 17th chapter of John, which says, "And this is eternal life, that they might believe in thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent," may be an exception, but you will find that Westcott, and others of the best New Testament commentators, regard that phrase as a parenthesis of John the Evangelist, and not part of our Lord's great prayer.

I hope I am not misunderstood. I am meaning only that Christ's conception of God and His practice of prayer did not rest merely on the theistic interpretation of the universe and the nature of its Creator in His majesty and almightiness. They rested on the father conception which He revealed in Himself. Just run over in your thought His prayers: the prayer that He taught us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven;" the prayer He offered Himself when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Him: "I thank thee, Father, lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and the understanding, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for it seemeth good in thy sight;" the prayer that He offered in the temple, when Philip and Andrew came to Him with the message about the Greeks who were seeking to see Him: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour;" the prayer that He offered before the grave of Lazarus, "Father, I thank thee that thou hearest me, and I know that thou hearest me always;" the prayer that He put up in Gethsemane, "My Father, if this cup cannot pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done;" and the last prayer of all, when, as a tired little child, He lay down in His Father's arms and fell asleep: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." He never pushed God off into His almightiness; not once in all His life of supplication can you find Him dealing with God in this way. He never smote the heart with the chill of the divine

attributes. You may be recalling, perhaps, that one cry of His from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—a quotation from one of the Psalms and a shout of victory. I think that could be demonstrated to be a shout of victory and not a cry of isolation; but that alone would be your exception. All the other times it was, "Father," "my Father," "holy Father," "righteous Father"—sometimes, we may believe, in the quiet intimacy of His secret consciousness, "my dear Father." What a reality this conception of prayer gives to it. We are not praying to any cold theistic God alone; we are praying to our Father made real to us, warm with the warmth of a great tenderness for us, living with a great consciousness of all our human suffering and struggle and conflict and need.

It makes prayer, for one thing, a rational thing. I can go to my Father and ask Him for the things that I need. There is an exquisite passage in Andrew Bonar's journals in which he speaks of sitting one day in his study and looking out of his window and seeing two of his children pass through the fields. He said as he saw those little children making their way across the fields, the love in his heart overcame him, and he pushed his books away from him on the table, and went to the door and called out across the field to them, and they came running eagerly in response to their father's loving call. And when they had come, and he had caressed them, he said he gave each one of them something simply because the ecstasy of his fatherly love made it impossible that he should not do something then for those two children who were so dear to his heart. Do you suppose that God is an inferior sort of a father? Do you suppose that there are impulses in us toward our children, or in our fathers toward us, that are not simply just the dim and the faded suggestion of nobler and diviner impulses of the father heart of God? Prayer in the sense of supplication for real things becomes a rational reality to men who believe in God in Jesus Christ.

FELLOWSHIP

And how sweet it makes prayer in the sense of living fellowship. Do you suppose that we are nobler characters than that great Father after Whom these human fatherhoods of ours are named? Do you suppose that if it is sweet to us to have our little children come creeping to us in the dark, it is not sweet to our heavenly Father here, everywhere, to have men, His sons, come stealing to His side and His love? This is no excessive way of putting it. Is it not guaranteed to us by those words which our Lord spoke that Easter morning as He stood there by His open grave, and the woman who adored Him was about to clasp His feet, "Mary, go and tell my disciples that I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, my God and your God." Yes, that is the right way to put it today. No God for us, nowhere through the whole universe a real and satisfying God for us, except the God Who is discovered to us in Jesus Christ, and Who is calling to us today by the lips of Christ, "My son, O my son," and Who would have us call back to Him, if we be true men, "My Father, O my Father."