

IS FAITH IN THE BIBLE REASONABLE?

By

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and

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“Mid-Week Forum Hour”

SEVENTH MID-WEEK FORUM

MR. OLSEN: Dr. Clark, it is my happy privilege to welcome you to our Mid-Week Forum. While a non-college man, my business has led me into acquaintance with many college professors, but that acquaintance has been entirely in the field of economics and banking. You are the first honest-to-goodness philosophy professor I have met, so you won't mind if I feel almost a sense of awe in your presence.

DR. CLARK: Let me hurriedly relieve you, Mr. Olsen. You will soon see that philosophers are as mortal, as human, as fallible, and quite as queer as any other type of professor. Fortunately for us we do not face the pitiless publicity given to economic professors in their discordant solutions of our national troubles. However, let me assure you that I am delighted to be with you this evening.

MR. OLSEN: Thank you, Doctor. There is an added pleasure to me in your being here. There seems to be an apparent acceptance upon the part of a large percentage of people that an educated man no longer accepts the so-called worn-out theories about the Bible and the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. For example, some few years ago a very close friend and associate of mine was active in the circle of the Alumni Federation at Columbia. Through his office, a conservative theologian was invited to address

the Chapel one morning. My friend asked several Columbia friends and professors to hear this preacher, whose scholarship was unquestioned. After the service, one gentleman turned to my friend and said, "John, I certainly enjoyed this service, but I had long ago supposed that educated men ceased to believe these things. Evidently I am wrong."

DR. CLARK: Well, Mr. Olsen, that individual was half wrong and half right. The sad fact is that many educated persons, particularly professors, reject the Bible and its teachings. The reason for this lies partially in the fact that while these educated persons are well informed on several subjects, they have not taken the trouble to investigate the evidence which substantiates the claims of the Bible. They have assumed that the critical theories of the nineteenth century are true and have neglected the more recent discoveries of the archaeologist. The new evidence unearthed shows undeniably that the Bible is not a collection of fairy tales.

MR. OLSEN: Dr. Clark, of course I know that the average man gets his science from the newspaper and because error has circled the globe before truth has buckled its boot straps, there are many who believe the Bible is a collection of fairy tales. I am sure everyone will listen with interest if you give us some details of these archaeological discoveries to which you have alluded. But first, why is it that you who are supposed to be a philosopher emphasize archaeology? Isn't that slightly outside your field of study?

DR. CLARK: So it might seem, Mr. Olsen. But more strictly I am rather a student of philosophy, than a philosopher. At any rate the last ten years have been devoted to a study of Greek philosophy and aside from my personal interest in Christianity the later Greek age has led me to a study of the conditions under which the New Testament was written. And further, some of the problems which the Bible presents are found also in the study of Plato.

MR. OLSEN: Now wait just a moment. I do not quite see the relation between the philosophy of Plato and the truth of the Bible. What is this connection you speak of?

DR. CLARK: It is this. The phrase Higher Criticism has come to mean to many ordinary Christians a particularly destructive attack on the Bible. But Higher Criticism, strictly understood, means only the attempt to answer such questions as: Who wrote this Book? Where and when and how did He write it? Obviously, these questions may be asked, and actually are asked concerning other ancient books besides the Bible. To be specific, they are asked with respect to Plato's dialogues. Now I wish to draw certain parallels between Platonic criticism and Biblical criticism.

First: During and after the time Plato wrote his masterpieces pupils and imitators wrote similar dialogues; and not everyone knew which were genuine and which were not. Similarly, during and after the writing of the New Testament - I leave out of consideration the Old Testament for the moment and will come to it later - during the writing of the New Testament, other persons not so well acquainted with the life and teaching of Christ wrote various gospels and epistles.

Second: Since it was necessary to distinguish the authentic from the spurious Platonic dialogues, the Alexandrine scholars, familiar with all the traditions of Greek literature, decided that Plato wrote thirty-six certain dialogues, and that the remaining ten were forgeries. Likewise the Church, using the testimony of men like Papias, Ignatius and Polycarp, who knew the original disciples and what they wrote or did not write decided that certain twenty-seven books were genuine and the remainder were not.

Now the third parallel brings us down to modern times. Toward the end of the eighteenth century and reaching its climax in the late nineteenth century, a great wave of skepticism swept over the majority of scholars. Although no new evidence had been found, Higher Criticism rejected all but nine or ten of the thirty-six genuine Platonic dialogues. In the New Testament, too, men like Schleiermacher, D. F.

Strauss, F. C. Baur, asserted that the Gospels were not written by the men whose names they bear, or even if some of them were, the contents are largely mythical. Of the rest of the New Testament, perhaps only Romans, Galatians and the Corinthian letters were genuine. I wish to emphasize this parallel. Both Plato and the Bible were called largely spurious.

Now, the Christian religion is the religion of the Bible. If the Bible is false, then there is little use bothering with Christianity, at least in any vital way. And as long as people believe the Bible false, they will not listen sympathetically to any appeal to accept Christ as Lord. There are many such people today. But their disbelief is based, more largely than they themselves suspect, on the conclusions of nineteenth century scholars.

But to return to the fourth and final Platonic parallel. Today in Platonic Criticism all the nineteenth century skepticism is not only repudiated, it is forgotten. The queer theories which were discussed in all their intricacies fifty years ago are no longer mentioned. The view now held is that if perchance one or two of the dialogues are spurious, the ancient Alexandrine scholars were substantially right. The Platonic corpus is virtually unbroken.

MR. OLSEN: Say, that's most interesting. But does the parallel still continue? Has the New Testament also recovered - or rather, have critics of the Bible recovered from the malaria of nineteenth century criticism?

DR. CLARK: In great part, yes. The situation for the New Testament and the Bible as a whole is more complicated than that of the Platonic dialogues. It really makes little practical difference in our everyday lives whether the dialogues are genuine or not. But if the Bible is genuine, then the critic stands a condemned sinner before a righteous God. And that makes a difference. Unbelieving scholars naturally try to avoid such an admission. The Bible therefore faces a religious prejudice that the Platonic dialogues never had to meet. Yet, in spite of prejudice, the Bible is being justified before men. In 1911 the famous liberal theologian, Harnack, was forced by the evidence to admit that Luke and Acts, previously regarded as historical novels of the second or third century, were actually written in the first century. Archaeological discoveries since that date lead us to conclude that Luke was one of the most accurate historians the world has ever known. Likewise the epistles, previously rejected, are now with sporadic exception acknowledged as genuine. The one New Testament book against which the attack still rages is the Gospel according to John. It is not surprising that this book which so clearly presents the Saviour from sin should still remain the target for unbelieving prejudice. But is it too much to predict that just as the skepticism in Platonic criticism has been swept away, so, too, the attacks on the authenticity of the Bible will also be defeated. No, it is not too much so to predict; because the discoveries of the archaeologist are day by day confirming the truth of the Scriptures.

MR. OLSEN: To me it seems quite apparent that all this talk about the consensus of scholarship being opposed to the genuineness of the New Testament writings is threadbare and out of date. But how about those interesting archaeological findings as they effect the genuineness of the Old Testament writings?

DR. CLARK: To answer your question, Mr. Olsen, let me compare the results with the statements of earlier higher critics.

Julius Wellhausen, the most destructive and at the same time the most influential of the Old Testament critics, wrote in 1880 that the patriarchal narratives in Genesis afforded us no historical information whatever. He held that the state of society described in Genesis was merely a mirage caused by writers of the eighth century projecting their customs back into the eighteenth century B. C.

Wellhausen has been definitely proven wrong. But the material which proves him wrong, all the pottery, the weapons, the armor, the utensils and some inscriptions, is too vast in amount to describe here and now.

But we can refer to the war of the Kings described in Genesis XIV. These Kings are said to have marched from Mesopotamia, around the desert, and down into Palestine on the east side of the Jordan.

As late as 1929 some people believed that this march was mythical because they said no invading army would march through Ashteroth and Ham down the east side of the Jordan. All thirty or more historical invasions of Palestine have come down the west side.

But in 1929 a friend of mine accompanied an expedition which dug up that eastern line of march.

So once again, the nineteenth century destructive criticisms and its twentieth century echoes are being hushed into oblivion.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out that the whole argument against the Bible has been that there was no evidence to prove the Bible true. And the Bible, being the basis of Christianity, was assumed to be false unless it could be proven true. Now, need it be pointed out that an argument whose basis is the absence of evidence is a poor one? And second, that the inference from no evidence to falsity is a logical fallacy? These two points alone would lead one to question the scholarship of the destructive critics.

Today we have evidence. We see clearly now that the Bible was right, and its defamers were wrong; and yet the attempts to popularize the destructive views still have their effect. Many people still reject the Bible because of the claims of these now discredited men.

It seems to me that we Christians have the right to issue a challenge to unbelievers, whether they are scholars or not. We present evidence to show that the Bible is true. Discovery after discovery confirms the accuracy of the inspired writers. Now we challenge unbelievers to produce accredited archaeological discoveries to prove the Bible false. If the Bible is a pious fraud, it must contain innumerable mistakes. It should then be easy for the enemies of Holy Scripture to present the evidence.

Up to the present at least, it seems that the faith of the unbeliever, I repeat, the *faith* of the unbeliever in the falsity of the Bible is sustained not only without evidence but against evidence. The faith of the Christian, on the other hand, is now, and always has been since the first five hundred people saw the risen Christ, a belief based on evidence. Faith, true faith, is belief on evidence; and we Christians have the evidence.

MR. OLSEN: Dr. Clark, I am indeed thankful for your visit this evening and for the very interesting parallel you have drawn between the dialogues of Plato and the Scriptures but chiefly am I interested in the conclusions that you have drawn. I absolutely agree with you that if the Bible is a pious fraud it must contain innumerable mistakes and it should be easy for the enemies of Scripture to present the evidence. The fact is such evidence cannot be produced. The Bible is today more attested in its claims than at any prior period in history. Thank you for your splendid effort.

Now I desire to direct a word specifically to our radio audience. On previous occasions I have stated the purpose of this broadcast is to present a positive message to a bewildered age. Today men are running hither and yon seeking for some voice in the wilderness that might lead us out of our bewilderment but alas they are all like sounding brass and tinkling symbols. However, there is one Voice that speaks with authority and that cries out "This is the way. Walk therein." That Voice is our Lord Jesus Christ. It was He Who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The Bible declares very clearly that all have sinned; and come short of the glory of God. Furthermore, that the wages of sin is death. However, it does not stop there: it goes on to declare that the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. Complete redemption is offered to man, which redemption has been accomplished through the death of our Lord upon the Cross. Through that sacrifice sin was expiated and righteousness was sustained. God is now able to save completely all who will come unto Him by Christ. It should be evident that our Lord Jesus Christ is the answer to the

craving of the human heart, to the question of the human mind, and the anchor for the soul in periods of distress as well as in times of peace and plenty.