

The Dods' Controversy.



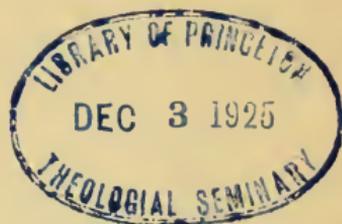
BX 9084 .D6

The Dods' controversy

BW5546

DBDB

✓ Warfield Library
The Dods' Controversy.



“When He the Spirit of Truth is come,
He will guide you into all truth.”—JOHN xvi. 13.

EDINBURGH:
MACNIVEN AND WALLACE.

Dr Parker on Dr Dods' Sermon.

(1) Note the title of the discourse. It is not, What is a full-grown Christian? What is a Presbyterian Christian? What is an ideal Christian? The title is simply, "What is a Christian?" An author must be allowed to define his own limit and purpose. Within that definition every author must be judged.

(2) Note the tone of the discourse. It is a tone of encouragement. The preacher pleads with his hearers to begin where they can, and assures them that faithfulness is always followed by fuller light. He does not tell them where to end; he tells them simply where to begin. Surely this is most pastoral and most comforting. A beginning is all that some men need.

(3) Note the structure of the discourse. It is not an academical manifesto. It is not addressed to an esoteric circle. It might have been preached in the open air at a street corner in the Canongate. There is not one bit of literary pretence about it. Gowns, bands, cathedrals, aisles, and arches are all out of keeping with this earnest simplicity. Observe:—

(a) The preacher did not mentally say: "I am writing for critics, theologians, and heresy-hunters, so I must be on my guard, and so thoroughly patch my sermon with parenthesis that the intricacy may defy, or at least bewilder, all hostile criticism." The sermon is happily destitute of latent suspicion. It is the speech of a candid and affectionate heart.

(b) If Dr Dods could have foreseen the excitement which his discourse has created, probably one or two of his sentences would have been framed with a little more care. It is quite clear that a sentence here and there could be torn out and made to look theologically suspicious; but this would be violence, not criticism. The discourse must be judged as a whole, and judged from its author's standpoint. Specially must it be read in its own atmosphere.

(c) Probably Dr Dods would now choose a different text for his discourse. I do not, as a student of homiletics, see how the discourse comes out of the text. There is an obvious sense in which the text is profoundly and even mysteriously theological, whereas the sermon is purposely elementary and practical. As a student of matters pertaining to the pulpit, I could not say this sermon is the amplification of this text. I do not see how this plant comes out of this root. But because I don't see it, it does not follow that Dr Dods does not see it. I simply suggest that some other text might perhaps have been more obviously to the author's immediate point.

(4) Note the position of Christ in the discourse. Christ is in the first sentence of the discourse and in the last. Christ is on every page

of the discourse. The preacher's one purpose is to bring men to Christ—not to the Christ of the theologian, but to the Christ which the broken-hearted sinner needs. A sermon fuller of the spirit and purpose of Christ it would be difficult for me to name. The preacher glows with his theme. To him there is but one Christ—the Christ of the saving cross.

(5) Note one or two doubtfully-expressed sentences in the discourse. They are, however, only doubtful where not taken with the context or construed in the general spirit of the discourse. Thus:—

“Religion is that which unites us to God, and the religion of Christ is Christ's method of uniting us to God.”

Yes and No. Religion is more and other than this, if it be taken etymologically. The last part of the sentence might be verbally improved. Not “Christ's method” as one of many—any one of which would do—but Christ's method as unique in vitality, largeness, and divinity of righteousness and love. This is Dr Dods' own meaning, without a doubt.

“This revealing of the true God, and this real union to Him, Christ accomplished by living a human life and dying a human death on earth.”

Yes and No. What is “a human death”? The expression easily lends itself to perversion. Taking this sentence by itself, there is nothing in it distinctively evangelical: there is, indeed, nothing necessarily supernatural. But the sentence must not be taken by itself. Read it in connection with p. 9: “I do not understand how anyone who thinks that Christ was merely man,” &c. This destroys the Unitarianism of the theology. At the same time, it qualifies the term “human,” and suggests that a better term could have been chosen. If Christ was more than human, He died a more than “human death.” Dr Dods would say this most emphatically. The resurrection determines the quality of the death. If Christ rose from the dead, then His death was not merely human.

“Christ's presence on earth is the manifestation of God's fatherly love for us. That is enough.”

Not without explanation. The words on page 9 must be added, and the whole argument must be suffused with their spirit if the author's full meaning is to be comprehended. To me Christ is God as well as man. I cannot explain this, but I believe it. Christ did not only manifest God; He also manifested *Himself*. At that point of Christ's self-disclosure I leave Unitarianism for ever. So does Dr Dods. We lose much by limiting Christ's “manifestations” to one aspect—even the manifestation of the Father.

“If, then, we are accepting God's forgiveness, and living humbly in the sunshine of His favour, we need not be seriously disturbed in spirit if we find that we cannot accept what is known as the orthodox theory of the Atonement.”

This sentence may be so easily misunderstood that I am inclined to think it might have been re-cast or even omitted with advantage. “Cannot accept” is one thing, but “utterly deny” or “utterly re-

pudding" (which is the language of some men) is another, and it must be remembered Dr Dods is not addressing the latter. There is a sense in which a negative may be larger than a positive. Not to exclude may be almost to include. Dr Dods is simply clearing the ground for others; he is not stating his own theory or his own relation to any creed he may have subscribed.

A Free Church Elder on
"The Question at Issue."

IN dealing with these subjects it would be well if all sincere friends of truth would keep in view such points as these:—

1. The questions now under discussion, unlike some which have engaged the attention of theologians, are not questions between believers in the Bible and unbelievers, between Christians and infidels. Opposite views, or at least views which are by no means identical, are held by earnest Christian and evangelical men, and, no doubt, could be supported on each side by telling quotations from equally sound authorities. It is not to be assumed, therefore, by any man who does not claim infallibility for himself, that opinions must be unorthodox and dangerous merely because he does not agree with them, or does not yet quite understand them.

2. If one class of opinions expose us to the danger of regarding any portions of the Bible as being the work of men, which may really be the inspired Word of God, there is a corresponding danger, on the other hand, of our treating as the Word of God what may have been the utterances of fallible and mistaken men, or the unfaithful records of careless and ignorant scribes. This danger appears to many to be the greater of the two. It is, at all events, very consistent with reverence and jealous regard for the Word of God to scrutinise closely whatever is alleged to have this high authority. One of the parting exhortations which the Bible addresses to us is—"Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world;" that is, many persons professing to speak by divine inspiration, who did not in fact do so. If this critical scrutiny was the personal duty of every Christian in the Apostolic age, at what date and by what authority did it cease to be a duty? Dr Candlish says (in "Reason and Revelation")—"If the Scriptures have God as their author it surely concerns us all the more on that account to have them submitted to the most searching critical scrutiny." Such trial and scrutiny would of course be only a mockery if there were no possibility that some of what passes for the word of God might fail to establish its claim, or rather, perhaps, the claim made on its behalf. For—

3 The Bible nowhere claims inspiration and authority, still less

verbal inspiration and infallible accuracy, for everyone of the sixty-six separate books or writings of which it is made up and every portion of each. This is a claim absolutely of human origin, and is too nearly akin to those forms of religious belief which trust more to the letter than to the spirit. That God has spoken to us in and through the Bible is equally maintained by both parties to the present controversies, but the Bible itself tells us little or nothing as to the extent or the method of the inspiration under which men have spoken or have claimed to speak with divine authority.

4. No person of the slightest intelligence supposes that the sacred writers were mere pens or machines writing down the exact words which were dictated to them by the Holy Spirit; still less that these exact words have come down to us with unfailing accuracy. It has always been a commonplace of evangelical teaching and is expressly maintained by Gaussen and other advocates of plenary inspiration, that in the writings, for example, of evangelists and apostles we have the personal characteristics of each writer; and those who read these works in the original languages tell us of marked peculiarities of style which are not discernible in a translation. To understand and to explain with precision how the divine and the human elements are combined in these writings, must obviously be an extremely difficult problem, and one upon which the most orthodox persons may reasonably hold different views. The Bible itself throws no light on this problem, and the authors of the Confession of Faith have wisely refrained from dogmatising about it. To brand with heresy opinions about this, merely because they are new to us, or because we scarcely care to trouble ourselves about them, is equally absurd and unjust.

5. It is to be feared that a good deal of the alarm that is felt when new views (that is, new to us) are expressed on such subjects, arises from want of robustness of faith. Very worthy people who have read little and thought less on such subjects, and who perhaps justly feel that they are not very competent to decide on them for themselves, prefer to cling tenaciously to the letter of traditional dogma. They are scarcely to be blamed. If they have got a grip of anything that helps their religious life, they had better not let it go till they know where else to find firmer ground. But let them be tolerant of the stronger and clearer faith of others who hold the great truths of Christianity with so much confidence that questions of more or less of inspiration, and others of a like kind, do not disturb them.

Lastly, the very worst method of contending for the truth as we ourselves hold it is to try to "cast out of the synagogue" all who differ from us. There are, no doubt, precedents for this way of acting. Broad Churchmen and narrow Churchmen have always existed, and are likely always to exist; but it was not the broad but the narrow Churchmen of our Lord's day who crucified Him and persecuted His apostles. I would rather not dwell, however, upon this. All I would say is that it is most painful to see how Christian men would drive out of the Christian Church, as far as they have the power to do so, others who are at one with them on all the great questions of the faith, merely because on one or two points

their opinions, or possibly only their ways of expressing them, are not in accordance with what their accusers have been accustomed to.

I may take leave to add that, having long clung to the theory of plenary and verbal inspiration under the influence of Gaussen and other writers, I have happily found that broader views on the subject have immeasurably strengthened my belief in an inspired revelation and in the paramount authority of the Word of God.

*A Free Church Elder on
"Inspiration and the Bible."*

I would fain not disturb any person's faith in the plenary and verbal inspiration of every book of the Old and New Testaments, and even if his belief were so comprehensive as to apply to our English version with the titles of its books, and the excellent headings of its chapters, and its marginal references, and to treat them all as miraculously preserved from error, I would only congratulate him on his having a useful working hypothesis, which may do him some good, and will do him no great harm, provided he is not too fanatical about it. I would certainly not turn him out of the Christian Church for holding these opinions, even though in my view they have a dangerous tendency. But our opponents are not so tolerant, for our views are described as "dishonouring to God, and subversive of His word," although our aims and motive are the very opposite of this. But perhaps the question at issue will be best understood if we pass from the abstract to the concrete.

I have lately been reading with my family the books of Joshua and Judges, though with considerable omissions. These books, if the narrow church view is right, are to be accepted as equally of divine authority with the Ten Commandments, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians. God "has so over-ruled and assisted them (the writers of all the books in the Bible) as to preserve them from error and to infallibly express His mind." Now the books I have named present certain views of the character and providence of God, and it is a very important question whether we are absolutely bound to accept these views. I would ask, then, of those who think that we are, whether, in the first place, they can tell us who wrote these books. On whose authority have they been received into the canon, and were the persons who did receive them fallible or infallible? What does reception into the canon signify, and is it clear that the very obscure persons who formed the Old Testament canon, or the Divine authority assumed to have been behind them, ever intended to testify that admission into the canon indicated the inspiration and infallibility of every word of every book so admitted? The writers of the books I have named speak with great certainty as to their knowledge of the mind of God, but many persons

have done this, and, alas, do it every day, who are yet completely mistaken; and I ask what evidence have we that the authors of these books enjoyed any inspiration at all, or if they did, that they were divinely preserved from all error? The idea is denounced with severity that an "inspired writer could mix up with God's Word utterances of his own as a fallible and mistaken man." But why? To say that this is impossible is to assume a knowledge of the methods and extent of inspiration which is not derived from the Bible itself, nor sanctioned by the Standards of the Presbyterian Churches. To say that an inspired writer preserved "his own faculties, idiosyncrasies, and acquirements," but nothing whatever of the liability to error inherent in his humanity, is simply to beg the whole question. The mixture of the divine and the human in the person of Christ and in the writings of His followers is one of the most mysterious problems of Christianity, and the more we think of it the more we shall be satisfied that it transcends our imagination, and that it is presumptuous to dogmatise upon it.

I fear that many excellent persons who cling to the doctrine of the inspiration and infallibility of every word in the Bible, because they find this doctrine useful to themselves, have no idea of the infinite harm they do to others by insisting that all persons are bound to hold the same opinion. To maintain the equal inspiration and authority of every book and every chapter and verse in the Bible puts its most vital and important teaching on the same level with the most equivocal. It plays into the hands of the opponents of Christianity, who are only too ready to welcome and support the view sometimes expressed by Christian writers, that unless a man can accept the whole Bible, he need not accept any of it. There is no more common weapon used by infidel writers and orators than to attack certain books and passages in the Bible, and to urge that the whole must stand or fall together. Surely it is a great gain to the Christian apologist and a prodigious relief to perplexed inquirers after truth to hold that it is at the least possible that there are things in the Bible which are not necessarily the Word of God, but may be the utterance of a fallible and mistaken man.

The question I have sought to raise is not what is the true theory about inspiration, but whether no other theory is to be tolerated in the Christian Church than that every sentence and word in the whole Bible, as we have it, has been preserved from error, and infallibly expresses the mind of God. Such a theory to be accepted as excluding all other theories, and entitling the holders of it to cast out of the Church all who do not subscribe to it, would need to be established by far stronger proofs than have ever been brought forward in support of it.

But as many excellent persons will tremble at the notion that any other theory leaves them in uncertainty as to what portions of the Bible which they possess are to be accepted as "the Word of God," and what are to be regarded as at least possibly human and fallible, I may remind them that the Westminster divines point out that the only testimony which we are to accept as teaching us with certainty what is the Word of God is "the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." They go on to say—"We acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be neces-

sary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word." In other words, the letter of Scripture, be it ever so infallible, will be of small service to us unless we are illuminated by the Spirit; and we have to trust to the same teacher to guide us in discriminating between what is divine and what is human in the Scriptures. So taught, and only when so taught, we shall hear God speaking to us in His Word, our faith suffering no disturbance, though within the boards of the same very comprehensive volume we should also hear occasionally the accents of fallible men.

Dr Parker on the Dods' Controversy.

As to this immediate needless controversy, I would express myself freely upon one vital point. I am ashamed that some Christian men should have slandered some Christian brethren. There are men amongst us (whom I am prepared to name) who, without a tittle of theological qualification, are making themselves judges of such believers, and scholars, and teachers as Dr Dods. Their only excuse is their ignorance. They have arrogated to themselves the function of protecting Omnipotence. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them; the Lord shall have them in derision."

PHOTOMOUNT
PAMPHLET BINDER



Manufactured by
GAYLORD BROS. Inc.
Syracuse, N. Y.
Stockton, Calif.

BW5546 .D6D6
The Dods' controversy.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00038 6013