

MIRACLE AND SCIENCE

BIBLE MIRACLES EXAMINED BY THE
METHODS, RULES AND
TESTS OF THE
SCIENCE OF JURISPRUDENCE
AS ADMINISTERED TO-
DAY IN COURTS
OF JUSTICE

BY

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CHAPTER IX

IS MORAL IMPERATIVE A FUNCTION OF EVIDENCE

“If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” *Hebrews 2:3.*

WHEN there is presented to man, an intelligent moral being, evidence that affects materially his duty or his welfare, can he ignore or disregard the evidence without incurring guilt? In other words, is there moral imperative in evidence? Science and the Christian religion seem to be in accord in answering this question.

ANSWER OF SCIENCE

The science of jurisprudence responds as follows: When a juror is impaneled to serve in an action in a court of justice, he assents to the oath administered to him, which is substantially in these words:

“You do solemnly swear that you will well and truly try the issue in this case [describing it], and a true verdict render therein, in accordance with the evidence given you in court, — unless discharged by the court. So help you God.”

Greenleaf, our foremost authority in jurisprudence, in the department of evidence, as already noted, declares the law, to which there is no dissent, that when evidence is so produced to such juror in amount sufficient "to satisfy the mind and conscience of a man of common prudence and discretion, and so convince him that he would venture to act upon that conviction in matters of the highest concern in his own interest" it complies with the jural test of sufficiency. Also: "When we have this degree of evidence, it is unreasonable to require more." "A juror would violate his oath if he should refuse to acquit or condemn a person charged with an offense, where this measure of proof was adduced."¹ But violation of one's oath, duly required and taken, is the very essence of the crime of perjury — a crime of gross moral turpitude — sin. That is the answer of science. There is moral imperative in evidence.

ANSWER OF RELIGION OF CHRIST

The answer of religion to the question, whether there is moral imperative in evidence, may be discerned from the immediate teaching of the Master. When he approached the end of his earthly mission,

¹ Greenleaf, *Test. of the Evang.* pp. 24, 25.

Christ announced that it was expedient that he should go away, that when he departed he would send to men the Holy Spirit. Christ declared a function the Holy Spirit would perform, namely, he "will convict the world in respect of sin, *because they believe not on me.*" Believing "on" Christ is believing on him as he is revealed and represented in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It includes his attributes, offices, teachings, redemption works, sacrificial atonement, resurrection, as the Messiah. For brevity we so use the term Messiah. Believing this is not simply an act of the will, as voluntary. Honest, normal belief is a product: it is produced by evidence. Hence the responsibility of the soul which sins in not believing evidence is not primarily in an arbitrary act of the will; but the responsibility is that of failing to give honest, intelligent, faithful attention, consideration, and due credence to the evidence regarding Christ, his attributes, offices, teachings, and life, etc., which, through the Bible record, Deity presents to man.

The decision of the Master inherent in his announcement of sin, in not believing on him, proceeds on the fact that Christ knew that the evidence presented in regard to him now found in the Scriptures — proving Christ to be what he is there rep-

resented to be — is sufficient and ample, and that, if duly attended to and considered and given its normal effect, it would and will convince an honest, sane, intelligent soul that Christ is what the Scriptures reveal and represent him to be. In this view, the verdict of the Holy Spirit is also the verdict of Christ, proleptically announced. Christ's teaching is that eternal life or its opposite is proposed to each human soul on simple terms and conditions which Deity prescribes. This involves, and there is inherent in it, the highest interest and welfare of the soul that can possibly be conceived. The Creator has, in addition to this, laid on the soul he has created, the duty to conform to the conditions on which eternal life shall be attained and its opposite avoided. So self-interest in man and his duty to God combine in requiring every human soul faithfully to apprehend, attend to, consider, and give due credence to the evidence that is produced to it to prove Christ to be what the Scriptures reveal him to be. Hence the condemnation denounced by the Master is for failing to heed the evidence, failing to give it the consideration it deserves; or rejecting it, and so failing or refusing to believe. That failure, neglect, or refusal the Master and the Holy Spirit declare is sin.

This seems to be the answer of religion, which the teaching of the Master gives to the question at the head of the chapter. The answers of both science and religion seem clear, there is moral imperative in evidence; that a human soul cannot ignore, disregard, or refuse to give due credit to evidence which affects its duty or the real interest or welfare of the soul without incurring in such act guilt, moral turpitude, sin.

In considering their evidential function (p. 239) we saw that miracles were wrought in instances unnumbered, fairly described as multitudinous.¹ Miracles were constantly appealed to by the Master as wrought to cause men to believe on him as the Messiah, the Son of God.

“Though ye believe not me, believe the works” (*ἔργα*) (John 10:38); “Believe me for the very

¹“Great multitudes followed them, and he healed them all” (Matt. 12:15); later, “and great multitudes came unto him, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, . . . and he healed them” (Matt. 15:30); later, “and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them” (Matt. 19:2); again, “A great multitude out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coasts of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits . . . the whole multitude sought to touch him, for virtue went out of him, and he healed them all” (Luke 6:17-19). See *ante*, pp. 68-76.

works' sake" (John 14:11); "Woe unto thee . . . Bethsaida for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which were done in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes" (Luke 10:13; see too Matt. 11:23).

This is the express teaching of the Master himself. Moreover we saw that miracle evidence, supernatural proof, was the special and (as disclosed by the record) the real ground, the special evidence that caused the apostles and disciples to believe on Jesus as the Messiah.

SUPERNATURAL EVIDENCE TO PROVE SUPERNATURAL FACTS

In the nature of things, supernatural evidence was indispensable to prove the supernatural fact that Jesus was the Messiah. Jural law of grades of evidence required it. Supernatural evidence was the appropriate proof designed and produced by the Master to cause men to believe on him as the Messiah. These propositions not only stand on solid, rational grounds; but the record demonstrates their verity by actual test and trial. At Nazareth, in public assembly, Jesus gave his oral testimony witnessing to his neighbors that he was the Messiah, quoting the specific prophecy of Isaiah. This failed to

carry conviction to his hearers that he was the Messiah. They disbelieved it. As refuting the evidence of Jesus they declared of Jesus, This is the carpenter, son of Mary, brother of James and Judas and Simon, and his sisters are with us. He is Joseph's son (Mark 6:3; Luke 4:17-22). Although they noted the "gracious words" he spoke, their disbelief prevailed, and they became so enraged with his address before it ended, that they determined to kill him (Luke 4:29).

Also, when Jesus testified personally to the same Messianic truth to the Jews, he was to them a blasphemer. They took stones to kill him, as they said expressly, "because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:33). It was in the condition caused by this very discussion, and in this immediate connection, that Jesus said of his miracles, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works" (John 14:11). Here was recognition that humanity requires what God recognized Pharaoh might rationally demand, "Show a miracle for you," when a supernatural matter is to be verified, by evidence. The evidence was therefore mercifully adapted to human nature, to the nature of things, as well as to jural science. Jesus produced miracle as appropriate, competent, and, as experience demonstrated,

indispensable evidence to prove to men he was the Messiah and to cause them to believe on him as such.

Later we shall see that Christ taught his disciples directly that this miracle evidence should be used by them as the means and method by which they should execute the great commission of causing men everywhere to believe on him and become his disciples.

The Greek has three terms to describe miracles. They are rendered in our English Bible as follows: "Miracles" (*δύναμεις*), "wonders" (*τέρατα*), and "signs" (*σημεία*).¹ These three words occur more than three hundred times in the New Testament, and what they stand for pervades it throughout. On the day of Pentecost, Peter, "filled with the Holy Spirit" at the initial moment of commencing to execute the great commission, delivered a notable discourse condemning his people for crucifying Jesus. In that address Peter specified the evidence by which, as Peter knew, God had proved to him that Jesus was the Messiah; and in it there is no

¹Dr. Taylor, in his "Miracles of our Saviour," says: "A fourth-term description of miracles occurs only in John, and there only on the lips of John himself. It is (*ἔργα*) works," suggesting that, to Christ, miracle was only "common or ordinary" (p. 4).

thought of any evidence other than the supernatural, but the supernatural evidence is exhaustively described by the three names; viz. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by *miracles, wonders, and signs*, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know," ye have slain (Acts 2:22). As one commentator on the Greek Testament says, Peter showed that God had demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah "by every kind of Supernatural proof."¹

MIRACLE EVIDENCE ORDAINED FOR THE GREAT COMMISSION

Forty days after the resurrection, the time arrived which Christ had predicted, when it was expedient that he should "go away" and send the Holy Spirit to men. At the final interview, the Master with divine wisdom, utmost simplicity and brevity, as a last command, instructed his immediate disciples *how*, by what *means* and *method*, they should execute the great commission, and enjoined its use by them; viz. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me," everywhere, even "unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

¹Rev. J. A. Spencer, Greek Testament, English Notes, p. 331.

The function of a witness, and his duty also, is truly to communicate to others, needing the evidence, facts and truths the witness has himself known, experienced, or actually observed. Hence each disciple Christ so instructed in that final interview was commanded to labor to cause men to believe on Christ and become his disciples, by witnessing to men evidence that had caused such disciple himself to believe and follow Christ, which, as we have seen in the chapters referred to, was the miracle evidence, — the supernatural proof which the disciples by the last word of the Master were so enjoined to witness to men.

That the apostles and disciples so understood that instruction and command is shown by what they presently said and did. Within the ten days between the ascension (the time the injunction to witness was given) and the day of Pentecost, the disciples, moved by Peter, chose Matthias, in place of Judas, so that he could be a witness unto Christ as an apostle, he being qualified because, as Peter stated, he had "compained with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto the same day when he was taken up from us" (Acts 1:21, 22).

Further, on the day of Pentecost, Peter in oral

discourse witnessed to the supernatural proof, miracles, wonders, signs, that he knew caused him to believe on Christ, and that witnessing caused 3,000 souls then, on that day, to believe on Christ, become his disciples, and continue steadfast as such (Acts 2:41, 42). See specific witnessing for Christ.¹

PERPETUATING THE MIRACLE EVIDENCE

Because the witnessing "to the uttermost parts of the earth" could not be done orally by the disciples who especially received the command, they provided for so promulgating their testimony by perpetuating the evidence, reducing it to written depositions. Sixty or seventy years after the ascension, John made his deposition as such witness. We call it John's gospel: it is really John's deposition. Its dominant note throughout is the miracles — the supernatural evidence that caused John to believe. He summarizes, as before noted, at the end of the twentieth chapter:

"And many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (ver. 30, 31).

¹Acts 3:15. Illustrations are in evidence continually. We cite some (Acts 4:33; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 26:16, 22; 2 Pet. 15:18).

Corresponding depositions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, and associated disciples carry out that last instruction and command of the Master.

MIRACLE EVIDENCE PREPONDERANT

Examination of the record, to learn the character of what was produced as evidence to cause men to believe on Jesus as the Messiah, shows that whatever else may be discovered having a bearing on the question, this is true, the dominant, the overwhelming bulk of evidence produced to cause men to believe on Jesus as the Messiah was the miracles, the supernatural evidence; and further, that that was peculiarly designated evidence—the witnessing which the Master directed his disciples to employ, and which they did employ in executing the great commission. And let the great truth be ever remembered, never forgotten, that, so far as human effort operated, it was by that witnessing of that supernatural evidence, so ordained by the Master to be so employed, that Christianity was in fact originally established in the world.

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