

# AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

## A SERMON

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“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35

IN addition to what was said last Lord’s day morning upon these words, I now proceed to make a few more remarks upon *the design, the authority, the enabling, and the infallibility of the Scriptures*, “The Scripture cannot be broken.”

First, just a word more upon *the design of the Scriptures*. The design of the Scriptures is the salvation of man. There is no scripture that I am aware of, from Genesis to Revelation, that has not this end in view. All its history, all its biography, all its threatening’s, all its promises, all its precepts, and all that it contains, all hear upon this; because they all have a tendency to reveal on the one hand the infinite and eternal wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. I do not apprehend that the most terrible threatening’s in the Bible were put upon record simply for the sake of the threatening’s, nor simply for the sake of those that shall ultimately come under them; but that they are put upon record as the means by which the Lord is pleased to awaken sinners. Hence it is you will find, those who have had at least some small experience in the church of God, and have listened, as I have done in my time, to the testimony of hundreds that have been called by grace, will find scarcely a part of the Bible the most terrible, that has not been useful to some; some in one way and some in the other. And it must be remembered that all the threatening’s of the Bible are the voice of God’s law. We are apt to think that God’s law, what we call his law, is confined to the ten commandments. It is true everything is included in those ten commandments; but all the threatening’s of the Bible arise from God’s law, they are the voice of the law, and “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” So that these threatening’s in the Bible discover to the sinner whose eyes the Lord is pleased to open, the terribleness of his condition; and such a one says to himself, Where is the utility of my calling in question the truth of these threatening’s? Why, the condemnation has begun, it has commenced; first in its sentence upon my body, “Dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.” That threatening took effect, does take effect, and will take effect down to the end of time. Secondly, such a one says, There is another sense also in which the condemnation is begun. I see the sin. I see the guilt, I am afraid of God, I am afraid of life, I am afraid of death, I am afraid of eternity; I am a kind of Magor-missabib, a terror to myself. Now when a sinner is thus awakened, he sees at once that the great question with him is,

“Whither shall I flee,  
To hide myself from wrath and you?”

He looks about, and perhaps for a long time seeks to set matters to rights by his own doings. But in the Lord’s own time he shall see that there is a way of honorable escape, a way of righteous escape, a way of sure escape, a way of glorious escape, and that Jesus Christ has by himself met the threatening’s, that he has put sin away by his death, that he has brought in everlasting righteousness. Such an one will say, These are good tidings. “How beautiful,” such an one can say, and only such an one, “upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings these good tidings, that publishes peace” that is, a way of reconciliation to God, “that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, Thy God reigns!”

What, then, shall we say to the design of it? “The Scripture cannot be broken.” The design of it is this, the salvation of man from the wrath to come, the conformity of man to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to give unto man a glorious kingdom, that cannot be moved, a kingdom that shall not be left to other people, but the people for whom it was prepared shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom, and that for ever and ever. And then here is the sweet truth that the Lord is with us in the wilderness. Try you he will, but deliverances he will work, and hereby multiply his wonders in your experience, and cause you to say, indeed, “Who is a God like unto you?” And I may here ask this one question. While the design, of many mechanical contrivances and scientific discoveries, and the object of the lawful and admirable occupations of men in general, are very important to the human race, and exceedingly useful, and we are thankful for them, yet how infinitely short they fall of the great design of the Scriptures! Should we not, then, highly prize the Scriptures? Should we not bless God for the Scriptures? Should we not pray for grace to understand the Scriptures, to enjoy the Scriptures? for it is thereby the Lord brings us into fellowship with himself. It is his own blessed, blessed word.

But I notice, secondly, *the authority of the Scriptures*. Now in eternal things we must own no authority but the authority of the Scriptures. There are in the world, and there have been for many hundreds of years, men who say they have authority to forgive sin, to pronounce forgiveness of sin, and authority for many other things. Well, it will become me this morning to try that doctrine quietly, and in a proper spirit, I hope. Now the Lord said to his disciples, “Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained.” And again, “Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Now what; is the meaning of this? The Lord, they say, authorized his disciples thus to remit sin or to retain sin; thus, to bind the sinner or to set him free; and to this end, they say, were given to the apostles the keys of the kingdom of heaven. I have no doubt in my own mind but that the keys of the kingdom of heaven are the truths of the gospel. They are the keys, and they are given to every minister, and just as much given to every Christian in the world as they are to ministers. They are no more given to one class of men than they are to the other; for the Lord has promised all his children shall know him, and great shall be the peace of his children. A lawful possession of the keys signifies right and freedom? and “to as many as received him gave he power,” or right, “to become the sons of God,” Therefore, the truths of the gospel are the keys, and the people of God come by them lawfully, and they have a right to the Lord’s house, and to all that is in that house; they have a right to the gospel, and all that is in the gospel. Now how did

the apostles exercise (for that brings us to the point) that authority which the Lord gave them, “Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained;” now how did they exercise this authority? I will tell you; not because you do not know, but just only to remind you of how absurd is the intrusion of all human intervention or authority in this matter. There is not a single instance in the New Testament of the apostles remitting sin, only on one ground; and there is not a single instance in the New Testament of their retaining sin in the sinner, except on one ground. The ground upon which they remitted sin was that of *character*. Why did the apostle say to the Colossians, “Having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;” “and you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power;” on what ground did the apostle thus remit testimonially their sin? On what ground did he thus loose them from everything, and set forth their completeness in Christ? Why, on this one ground, that they were called by grace, they were quickened by the Spirit of God, and stood manifest to the apostle Paul as heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ. And on the ground of their manifested Christian character, as called by grace, quickened by the Spirit of God, ordained to eternal life, on this ground the apostle declared the forgiveness of sin. And where this was not the case, where people had not the Spirit of Christ, nor the grace of Christ, and were not called nor regenerated, the apostle declared that such should be lost, that such, dying in that state, should not enter into the kingdom of heaven. “He that believes shall be saved.” We will have some more instances before we come to what may be called its application. Go to the Epistle to the Ephesians, and you see in the first chapter how the apostle declares their eternal election, and all the blessings of everlasting love according thereto, and how they were predestinated to the adoption of children by Christ Jesus unto God, and how they had in Christ an inheritance, being predestinated thereto according to the good pleasure of him that works all things after the counsel of his own will. On what ground could the apostle thus speak of these people? On this ground: “You has he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.” And so, he goes on to describe the change, that they were brought to know that it was by grace they were saved through faith, and that not of themselves. Here again, you see, he declares their heirship, the remission of sin, and their eternal freedom, on the ground of character, On the ground that they were quickened by the Spirit of God, and stood manifest as children of God. Then, again, John in his epistle says, “Little children, I write unto you.” What does “little children” mean there? Why, we must take the little children there not literally, but spiritually; and if they were children spiritually, then they must have been born spiritually; and so, they were born of God, and were little children in the things of God. And how did John know that their sins were forgiven, so that he could pronounce the forgiveness of their sins? “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” Why, he knew it because they were little children; they were born of God, enlightened, reconciled to God, seeking and desiring, earnestly desiring, the sincere milk of the word. He saw the work of grace in them. And so, when Barnabas came to Antioch, he saw the grace of God and was glad, and therefore could speak of them as partakers of that grace. You will thus see that the apostles remitted the sins of people who stood manifest as born of God; they loosed them that stood manifest as born of God. “Stand fast,” said the apostle, “in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.” That is the way they exercised their authority. On the other hand, if persons bring another gospel, thereby proving they have another spirit, and thereby proving they are members of Antichrist, why, if an angel from heaven could do that, let him be accursed. So, they would not remit the sins of any but those that stood manifest as people of God.

Now, then, for the application. And you must do as I do this morning; I will speak of it personally to myself, and then you can apply it to yourselves. First, either I am quickened by the Spirit of God, or I am not; either I am raised up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, or I am not; either I am called by grace, or I am not; either I do stand manifest as an heir of glory, or I do not. Now if I do stand manifest as an heir of glory, the forgiveness of my sins is settled by the Scriptures; my freedom is settled by the Scriptures, my destiny is settled by the Scriptures, the solemn matters that stood between me and the Judge of all are settled by the Scriptures. Well, then, I do not want the priest; I do not want Dr. Pusey. If I am an heir of glory, the Scriptures have settled it. I do not want him. Why, man, it is settled; it was done before you came. I do not want you. Oh, but I absolve you. I tell you it is done, it is done. It is finished; I do not want your absolution. Now does not this show how absurd is their intrusion? On the other hand, if I am not called by grace, if I am not thirsting after God, if I am not seeking God by Jesus Christ, if I am still dead in sin, and if I am not the character to whom forgiveness belongs, can my fellow dying worm make me the character? Can a priest regenerate my soul? can Dr. Pusey, with all his amiableness, regenerate my soul? So that if I am not the character whose sins are forgiven, they cannot make me one, therefore in that case it is no use to go to them; and if I am the character, the matter is settled independently of man altogether. Now if what I am saying be true, then we come to another conclusion, namely, that the scripture is fulfilled in the unhappy case of thousands. "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Now we will go a little farther. Here is a man dying; he sends for man, that man prescribes certain rules of penance, and this dying man conforms to them all apparently. Presently the priest sees his way clear, as he thinks, to pronounce to that man the forgiveness of his sins. Where is that man to whom the priest has thus pronounced the forgiveness of sins? That man believes it. Where is that man? Under the ban of heaven, under the curse of heaven. "Cursed be the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm." What awful delusion! They must depend, more or less, thus on the word of the creature. How clear it is, then, that if we are not the character, they cannot make us so; if we are the character, we do not need them. And to be so deluded as to imagine they can do anything for us before God, is indeed to bring us under the curse. I wish the Puseyites, I mean the people that follow them, and I wish the laity, or main body of the Catholics, would all take one thing into consideration. If one point could be impressed upon their minds, if the Lord was pleased to impress it, it would indeed be a blessing. And it is this, you will always find that all these doctrines of Puseyism and Catholicism point to this one thing, the exaltation of the priesthood above the people. They all lead to that, because if you can look at the priest as being able to forgive your sins, if you can look at the priest as being able to turn bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ, and thereby give you eternal life, for "he that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life," what a tremendous prerogative that priest possesses! What a tremendous power that man possesses! Truly he sets himself above all that is called God; sitting in the professed temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Just so with Puseyism; it all has a tendency to exalt the priesthood. You see that if the people could but perceive that, they would say, Well, what is the meaning of this, what does it all tend to? It all tends to exalt the priesthood. Always remember that just in proportion in religious matters, mind you, as one class is exalted, in the same proportion the other must be degraded. Because you must not know anything except what they are pleased to teach you; and if you should read the Bible and get some light concerning the way of salvation, if they had it in their power they would extinguish your mortal life rather than you should have that divine light. See the degradation into which this must bring the people. But the glorious doctrines of grace have no tendency to exalt the priesthood, or if you please, the ministry. Well, but, say you, after all you ministers are

distinguished. Yes, ministers are; but in proportion as the minister rises, the people rise. There are only two grounds that I am aware of upon which the minister is honored, and both those grounds by the voluntary affections and feelings of the people. And what are the two grounds? First, the people believe him to be a faithful man of God; they believe that he knows the truth experimentally; they believe that it is dearer to his heart than thousands of gold and silver; they believe it is sweeter to his taste than honey and the honeycomb; they believe that he abides by it most faithfully, in private and in public; they believe that it is his meat and his drink. They thus receive him as a brother; they thus receive him as a Christian, and honor him as such. Is there anything wrong in this? I think not. Does this degrade the people? No, it is an evidence of their illumination, that they can see where the grace of God is, and can honor that grace, honor the man because of the grace, and honor the Lord thereby. The second ground upon which a true minister is honored is usefulness to the people. There is nothing wrong in that. There is a soul under guilt and bondage. That minister comes and preaches the gospel. The Lord attends the word with power, and such a one says, That minister, by the blessing of the Lord, was the means of bringing my soul into liberty. That minister was, under the Lord, the means of bringing me out of a state of nature, was the means of ending the arrow of conviction into my mind. That minister, said another, was of great use to me when I was in much domestic trouble, in severe affliction. He seemed to know all about it. He would sometimes say the very words that I have said in private; he bore me up in his hands as it were, his ministerial hands, and it strengthened me wonderfully, endeared the Savior, and I seem as though I shall never forget it. That minister, said another, was of great use to me in worldly trouble. Everything seemed going against me, all appeared to be going wrong; and the minister came into the crooked circumstances where I was, and showed it was the path in which the Lord will often lead his people, and it so strengthened and comforted me, I wondered how the man could know so much about me, and how he could be so exact in describing what I was and where I was. It was such a blessing to me, I shall never forget it, and I cannot but pray for him; I highly esteem him for his work's sake. Another says, I came to hear such a man; I was full of sin, infidelity, and blasphemy; I thought I had the most devilish heart that ever existed; I seemed as though I was full of demons, full of the dregs of hell; a filthier, viler wretch never crawled. And yet this minister rolled in the testimonies of that fountain that is opened for sin and for uncleanness, and preached the Savior's ability to save in that defiant sort of way, that down went my sins, up went my soul; the Savior was enthroned, Christ was precious, eternity thrown open, the gates of everlasting glory took me in, and I came out as happy as I was miserable when I went in. Bless God for such a minister. Highly esteem him for his work's sake. I would ask, then, does this respect for the minister degrade the people? No; they are all exalted together, for they are brethren, and there is no difference essentially between them. The one is led by the providence and grace of God to speak; the other is led to hear, and they thus admit they are of one. "But we," saith the apostle, have no dominion over your faith."

I do not know that there would be any good whatever done by using such terms against the errors of men as might be used; let therefore the fact stand before us, as I have before stated, the Scriptures settle the matter; and if they settle the matter, we do not need the intervention of man. As to the judgment that awaits those that are thus arrogating the prerogatives of the Most High, I believe that wrath will come upon them to the uttermost. I believe that there will be no mitigation. I believe that the judgments will be terrible upon all that adhere to the whole body of delusion, called the great whore of Babylon, and their ministers are called locusts that darken the air, and that prey upon the souls of men. Is it any wonder therefore that our forefathers, as soon as they became

acquainted with the whole Bible, should so cleave to the Scriptures? What is the authority of the Scriptures? The authority of your Maker, the authority of him that created the world by his word, as described in the 1st and 9th of Genesis. How mean, how contemptible is all authority that would set aside the Scriptures! So, then, the Scriptures settle everything, even the Pope himself; it settles him in our minds. What connection is there between the Pope and Peter? Why, if you read Peter's Epistles you will find that he condemns the very things that the Pope upholds. One of the favorite doctrines of the Pope is that he is above all kings; the doctrine of Peter was that we are to honor kings and them that are in authority. One of the favorite doctrines of the Pope is that he is to lord it over God's heritage; and the doctrine of Peter was that he was not to lord it over God's heritage. One of the favorite doctrines of the Pope is that nothing can be settled till he determines it; but the doctrine of Peter was that it is already settled, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you." So that there is not anything in existence more adverse to Popery than Peter's Epistles. They had better by half have chosen Judas for their head; there would have been a good analogy then. And that is where it is, that the genealogy of Popery at the last will be rectified, Peter's name will be taken away, and Judas' name put into its place. Hence Judas is called "the son of perdition," and the man of sin is called "the son of perdition." Peter's Epistles are as contrary to, and as much opposed to Popery and Puseyism as the Savior is contrary to and opposed to Satan.

See, then, the lofty authority of the Scriptures. God comes in, the matter is decided. What a mercy for us that we shall have that desire carried out, that Job had when he said, "I desire to reason with God"! And the Lord answers that desire by the prophet Isaiah. Come to the first chapter of Isaiah; the Lord says, "Come now, and let us reason together." What shall be my subject, Lord? for I am afraid, I am a sinner. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you be willing" to receive this testimony, "and obedient" to this, which is the evidence of faith, "you shall eat the good of the land," and that good is Christ Jesus., "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life." Do not, then, if you can help it, forget this one point; that the apostles remitted sins only on the ground of character, such character as none but God himself can constitute. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." Dr. Pusey tells us in a letter lately, "I have never refused absolution to anyone." Poor dear creature! he thinks that he is an authorized minister of the Church of England, what authority has that? What is the Church of England? A creation of the civil power. There is nothing spiritual in the Church of England, in the system, any more than there is in any other human laws. The Church of England is the creation of the civil power, or ecclesiastical law, or church law, pure civil law, parliamentary law. Popery, also, in its organization was a creation of the civil power, and has been upheld by the civil power until it has acquired such wide-spread existence. Why, at the present moment some of our members of parliament, and some of our magistrates, are literally afraid of the Catholics; and when a case comes before them out of one of those dens that will have to be by Government by-and-bye inspected, I mean the convents, the magistrate, in nine cases out of ten, is afraid to deal faithfully with it, he wants to get rid of it. Such, then, is the working of the fear of man, and the tendency there is in all classes to bow to the authority of man. Remember, then, that Church of England is a creation of the civil power, maintained by the civil power; and the system itself is as

unscriptural as Popery. It is only Popery dressed up, Popery a little refined. And the Puseyites are the most legitimate ministers of that Church, because they are carrying out what that Church originally was. All state churches are contrary to the Holy Scriptures. It is not in that mountain, not in Jerusalem, not after the law of men at all, but it is in spirit and in truth, independent of all civil power and civil law whatever. We ourselves are called upon, and we do rejoice to do so, to obey every ordinance and every law of man. We are loyal to our Queen; we are loyal to our Government; but they must not meddle with us in eternal things. If they do, we will rebel against the highest power that earth ever possessed. For what is the highest authority on earth when set by the side of the almighty authority, the indisputable sovereignty, of the everlasting God? Why, we disdain the thought of setting a dying mortal worm in authority beside the great God himself.

Now I had: intended to have a few words, thirdly, upon *the enabling's of Scripture*. That one thought might occupy us a long time, but I must not dwell upon it. What the Scriptures enable us to understand, what the Scriptures enable us to endure, the victories that the Scriptures enable us to achieve, and the confidence which the Scriptures enable us to have in God. Often when we are tempted to cast away our confidence some sweet scripture will come, perhaps that very scripture itself, "Cast not away your confidence, which has great recompence of reward." "Hold fast the truth, for in due time you shall reap if you faint not." Oh! how the Lord by his Scriptures enables his ministers from week to week to go preaching on, and yet always something to say! and how he enables his children to go on believing and profiting! and the profit is infinite and everlasting.

But I must, as I do not intend to take this subject up again at present, make a remark or two in conclusion upon *the infallibility of the Scriptures*. There is a fivefold sense in which the Scriptures cannot be broken. First, the end cannot be severed from the beginning, nor the beginning from the end. You cannot take the Bible and break off one part of it without breaking the whole. Take this as one evidence of it. Moses was the first writer, and have you not, all of you, remarked how Moses is quoted in nearly every book in the Bible? So, then, according to Dr. Colenso, who rejects Moses, the prophets were wrong, Jesus Christ was wrong, and the apostles were wrong, for they all quote Moses. I need not bring the instances; they are so many. The last book in the Bible, the Book of Revelation, see how gloriously it quotes Moses. In the 15th chapter, the victory the Lord wrought for the Israelites in bringing them out of Egypt is a type of the victory that Christ has wrought in bringing us out of worse than Egyptian bondage, and to a better land than that into which the Israelites were brought; and it is there said, "They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." Thus, the inspired authority of Moses runs through all the Scriptures, and ties them together with indissoluble ties; that you must have the whole, or else all deceived from first to last. So, then, they cannot be broken asunder; the heavens and the earth may pass away, but his word shall not pass away. Secondly, the Scriptures cannot be broken in their conditional dispensations. Adam was placed in the garden of Eden, and Adam fell; but his fall did not break the Scriptures. If Adam does not partake of the tree, he lives; if he does take of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, then he dies according to the Scriptures. So, let him stand or fall, in either case God's word stands. So, with the Jews. If they conform to their covenant, then that part of their covenant stands good, the promise of temporal advantage. If they apostatize from that covenant, then the penalty stands good. So that in either case the Scriptures could not be broken; if they do not stand good one way, they do another; they cannot be overturned. Then, thirdly, the threatening's cannot be broken. Oh, my hearer, it is a solemn truth, if we are not born of God, lost we must be, that is, if we die in that state. If we do not possess the faith of God's elect, lost we

must be. There is no alternative, there is no uncertainty. Hell is as sure as heaven; hell, to the unbeliever is his portion with as much certainty as heaven is to the believer; that is, dying in that state. This globe must be bushed with fire, the tremendous judgment must be ministered; the Scriptures cannot be broken. How long it may be before that day comes, we know not; but come it will. Fourthly, the Scriptures cannot be broken by anything that men in the way of persecution can do. Did they crucify Christ? They fulfilled the Scriptures in condemning him, not intentionally. Were the apostles brought before magistrates and kings, and has much blood of the saints been shed? All this the Scriptures foresaw; "the Scripture cannot be broken." And then, lastly, in the gospel sense of the word how delightful the thought that the Scriptures cannot be broken! "He has made with me an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire;" as much so when it does not grow as when it does grow. Not one promise can fail, not one jot nor tittle can pass away; all stands fast in Christ. He is the yea and amen Savior; he has confirmed the yea and amen gospel, he has established, the yea and amen promises. "The Scripture cannot be broken." God will abide by you; he will not forsake you. He knows no more about you, now than he did when he first took you in hand. As there was not anything could hinder his loving you, choosing you, sending you a Savior, bringing you to himself, there is not anything by which he will forsake you now. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Thus, we reject *in toto* all the pretensions of Popery and Ritualism, and our God to us is our all in all.

May the Lord lead us more and more into the certainty of his blessed word, for his name's sake.