

BIBLE

What is The Bible?

February 11, 2018 - 2 Timothy 3:15-16

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

The last chapter ended with Paul urging Timothy to continue with Christ, and with what he had learned from the teaching of God's Word. He gives two reasons why Timothy should be encouraged to do that.

First, 'because you know those from whom you learned it' (2 Tim. 3:14b). And who were they? His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice who had instructed him in the Christian faith from his infancy (2 Tim. 1:5), and also Paul himself, whose teaching he had sought to follow.

Second, 'how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:15). Timothy had a sound knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, which he had received from his grandmother and his mother, and he believed those Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God. In the next couple of verses, Paul goes on to expand the inestimable value of the Scriptures.

'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

The Bible's inspiration

'All Scripture is God-breathed.' That means the Bible owes its origin and its contents to the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit. Peter puts it like this: 'No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:20).

Nobody but the most prejudiced person would deny that the Bible is a unique book if only because, after existing for centuries, it continues to be taught, bought, distributed and loved more than any other book that has ever been written. But its true uniqueness lies in its unity, which is the hallmark of its divine inspiration. For the Bible is not just one book but a whole library of thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. These were written over a period of some fifteen centuries by more than forty authors all of whom were different, including kings (David, Solomon), philosophers (Ecclesiastes), poets (Psalms), farmers (Amos), statesmen (Daniel), priests (Ezekiel, Ezra), prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah), fishermen (Peter, John) and scholars like Paul. With such a variety of authorship over such a long period, one might expect the result to be a book that was no more than a mixed bag of ideas and inconsistencies. Instead, the Bible has a wonderful unity from Genesis to Revelation as it unfolds the single theme of God's plan of redemption.

Human inspiration, on the other hand, is something quite different. If we were to take some of the great writings of the world such as Plato, Aristotle, Josephus, Dante, Shakespeare etc., and join them in a single volume, all we would have would be a series of disconnected ideas and contradictions. There would be no unity or theme to hold the different books together as a single whole.

The inspiration of the Bible is also seen in its unique survival. All through history it has been a hated book for certain people because of its claim to be the word of the living God. But in spite of all attempts at times by emperors, dictators and totalitarian governments to destroy it by burning, confiscation and the imprisonment and persecution of those who read it and preach it, all such attempts have miserably failed—this remarkable book is still with us and is as widely dispersed as ever.

During the Stalin era in Russia, the Marxist government derided the Bible as a book full of legends, myths, and old wives' tales. It even established an anti-Bible museum in Moscow to try and convince the people. Yet for all their derision, the authorities were so desperately afraid that people would read it and believe it, that they put them in prison and in labour camps for doing so. Why? Because they knew that this unique book had the power to change people's lives.

Having stated that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, Paul now goes on to show its usefulness and purpose for the Christian—'and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness'.¹

Timothy has not only learned Paul's gospel and known Paul's authority. 'From childhood' he had been instructed in the Old Testament Scriptures presumably by his mother and grandmother, and he was therefore extremely familiar with them. He believed them to be divinely inspired, as Paul is about to say. So the second reason why he must abide in what he has learned from Paul is its harmony with these very Scriptures. This was

¹ Williams, P. (2007). *Opening up 2 Timothy* (pp. 81–84). Leominster: Day One Publications.

Paul's consistent claim. On trial before King Agrippa he had affirmed that he was teaching 'nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass; that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles' (Acts 26:22, 23). Similarly, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans he had described God's gospel to which he was set apart as what God had 'promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures' (Rom. 1:2; cf. 3:21).

So then, the two reasons why Timothy should remain loyal to what he has come firmly to believe are that he has learned it both from Old Testament Scripture and from the apostle Paul. The same two grounds apply today. The gospel we believe is the biblical gospel, the gospel of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, vouched for by both the prophets of God and the apostles of Christ. And we must resolve ourselves to heed the exhortation which Paul addressed to Timothy and to abide in what we have learned because of this double authentication.

4. The Origin and Purpose of Scripture (verses 15b-17)

Two fundamental truths about Scripture are asserted here. The first concerns its origin (where it comes from) and the second its purpose (what it is intended for).

First, 'All scripture is inspired by God'; it is God-breathed. Some scholars, as in neb, have translated the opening words of verse 16: 'every inspired Scripture has its use'. Such a rendering would place a double limitation on Scripture. It would suggest that not all Scripture is inspired, and that therefore not all Scripture is profitable, but only those parts which are inspired. Since the Greek sentence has no main verb, it is certainly legitimate, grammatically speaking, to supply the verb 'is' after, rather than before, the adjective 'God-inspired' and so translate 'every God-inspired Scripture is profitable'. The argument against this construction, however, is that it does not do justice to the little word 'and' (*kai*) which comes between the two adjectives 'God-inspired' and 'profitable'. This 'and' suggests that Paul is asserting two truths about Scripture, namely that it is both inspired *and* profitable, not merely one. For this reason we should render the sentence: 'all Scripture is God-inspired and profitable'.

What does he mean by 'all Scripture'? It seems to me not at all impossible that by this comprehensive expression he is including the two sources of Timothy's knowledge just mentioned, namely 'what you have learned' (*sc.* from me) and 'the sacred writings'. It is true that nowhere does the apostle explicitly call his Epistles 'Scripture'. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions he gets very near it, and he certainly directs that his letters be read publicly in the Christian assemblies, no doubt alongside Old Testament readings (*e.g.* Col. 4:16; 1 Thes. 5:27). Several times he claims to be speaking in the name and with the authority of Christ (*e.g.* 2 Cor. 2:17; 13:3; Gal. 4:14), and calls his message 'the word of God' (*e.g.* 1 Thes. 2:13). Once he says that, in communicating to others what God has revealed to him, he uses 'words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit' (1 Cor. 2:13). This is a claim to inspiration, indeed to verbal inspiration, which is the distinctive characteristic of 'Scripture'. Peter clearly regarded Paul's letters as Scripture, for in

referring to them he calls the Old Testament ‘the other scriptures’ (2 Pet. 3:16). In addition, it seems evident that Paul envisaged the possibility of a Christian supplement to the Old Testament because he could combine a quotation from Deuteronomy (25:4) with a saying of Jesus recorded by Luke (10:7) and call both alike ‘Scripture’ (1 Tim. 5:18).

His definition of Scripture, of ‘all scripture’, is that it is ‘inspired by God’. The single Greek word *theopneustos* would be literally translated ‘God-breathed’ and indicates not that Scripture itself or its human authors were breathed into by God, but that Scripture was breathed or breathed out by God. ‘Inspiration’ is doubtless a convenient term to use, but ‘spiration’ or even ‘expiration’ would convey the meaning of the Greek adjective more accurately. Scripture is not to be thought of as already in existence when (subsequently) God breathed into it, but as itself brought into existence by the breath or Spirit of God. There is no ‘theory’ or explanation of inspiration here, for no reference is made to the human authors, who (Peter says) ‘moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God’ (2 Pet. 1:21). Nevertheless, it is clear from many passages that inspiration, however the process operated, did not destroy the individuality or the active cooperation of the human writers. All that is stated here is the fact of inspiration, that all Scripture is God-breathed. It originated in God’s mind and was communicated from God’s mouth by God’s breath or Spirit. It is therefore rightly termed ‘the Word of God’, for God spoke it. Indeed, as the prophets used to say, ‘the mouth of the Lord has spoken it’.²

3:16 Some critics argue that *all* Scripture cannot be divinely inspired since a moral God could not possibly have inspired, say, the story of a horrible rape in Jdg 19:22–30. Scripture does record immoral acts. Inspiration guarantees its accuracy, not its divine approval. God’s approval or disapproval of human acts recorded in the Bible must be inferred from the comments of the biblical narrator, the divine response to the action, the purpose of the book as a whole, and biblical principles stated in other sections of Scripture.³

It should be noted that in v 15, Paul uses the expression *the holy Scriptures*, drawing special attention to its sacred character, presumably in contrast to the secular sources of the false teaching which he has just mentioned. An important aspect is the function of Scripture to *make wise for salvation*. This could be abundantly illustrated from the many times in which Paul in his letters appeals to Scripture in his expositions of God’s work of salvation in Christ.

V 16 sets out a clear statement about the character of Scripture and its usefulness. But the precise meaning has been much disputed. Some have questioned whether the Greek

² Stott, J. R. W. (1973). *Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy* (pp. 97–103). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1811–1813). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

word *graphē* necessarily refers to Scripture. It could mean any writings. But the use of the term in the NT to denote Scripture is well established. But does the term refer to the whole of Scripture or to only a part? The use of the word *all* is determinative. If *all* here means 'every' it would be possible to understand it of separate parts of Scripture. But parallel uses in the NT suggest that 'all' is the correct translation. That being so, Paul is assuming that Scripture in its entirety is *God-breathed*. But why does he need to inform Timothy of this? It would seem better to suppose that the main point of the passage is not so much the inspiration of Scripture as its profitableness. Timothy would know of its inspiration, and this would enhance its usefulness.⁴

The character of the teacher and witness is important in establishing the truth of the Gospel. Paul would have included himself and Timothy's parents, but the **whom** of the original text could also point to the Scriptures as the highest proof of the truth of the doctrines.⁵ Timothy had a lifetime of acquaintance with the Scriptures to teach him their power.

© **"is inspired by God"** This is literally "God exhaled." The *how* is not stated, but the *who* and the *why* are very specific! In 2 Pet. 1:21 the Spirit is the focus of inspiration, but here it is the Father. Both are active in this area!⁶

15. *And that from (thy) childhood.* This was also no ordinary addition, that he had been accustomed, from his infancy, to the reading of the Scripture; for this long habit may make a man much more strongly fortified against every kind of deception. It was therefore a judicious caution observed in ancient times, that those who were intended for the ministry of the word should be instructed, from their infancy, in the solid doctrine of godliness, that, when they came to the performance of their office, they might not be untried apprentices. And it ought to be reckoned a remarkable instance of the kindness of God, if any person, from his earliest years, has thus acquired a knowledge of the Scriptures.

Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation. It is a very high commendation of the Holy Scriptures, that we must not seek anywhere else the wisdom which is sufficient for salvation; as the next verse also expresses more fully. But he states, at the same time, what we ought to seek in the Scripture; for the false prophets also make use of it as a pretext; and

⁴ Guthrie, D. (1994). 2 Timothy. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1309). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F. (Eds.). (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (2 Ti 3:13). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁶ Utey, R. J. (2000). *Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey: I Timothy, Titus, II Timothy* (Vol. Volume 9, pp. 166–167). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

therefore, in order that it may be useful to us for salvation, it is necessary to understand the right use of it.

Through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. What if any one give his whole attention to curious questions? What if he adhere to the mere letter of the law, and do not seek Christ? What if he pervert the natural meaning by inventions that are foreign to it? For this reason he directs us to the faith of Christ as the design, and therefore as the sum, of the Scriptures; for on faith depends also what immediately follows.

16. *All Scripture; or, the whole of Scripture;* though it makes little difference as to the meaning. He follows out that commendation which he had glanced at briefly. First, he commends the Scripture on account of its authority; and secondly, on account of the utility which springs from it. In order to uphold the authority of the Scripture, he declares that it is *divinely inspired*; for, if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.

If it be objected, “How can this be known?” I answer, both to disciples and to teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the same Spirit. Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spake. The same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, now also testifies to our hearts, that he has employed them as his servants to instruct us. Accordingly, we need not wonder if there are many who doubt as to the Author of the Scripture; for, although the majesty of God is displayed in it, yet none but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought, indeed, to have been visible to all, and yet is visible to the elect alone. This is the first clause, that we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.⁷

⁷ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (pp. 247–249). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.