

THE SPIRIT-INSPIRED WORDS

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Ted Schroder, July 25, 2010

“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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.” (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

What is the connection between being a Christian, i.e. believing in and following Jesus Christ, and learning from and being convinced of the truths of the Bible? St. Paul makes a case for the very closest of connections. The Holy Scriptures are “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” The Bible is essentially a handbook of salvation. Its overarching purpose is to teach not facts of science, which we can discover by our own investigation, but facts of salvation, which no human research can discover but only God can reveal. The whole Bible unfolds the divine scheme of salvation from the beginning of creation, the chosen people and the promised Messiah. Since salvation is through the Savior, Christ Jesus, the Bible focuses its attention upon Christ.

Paul is referring first of all to the Old Testament. Jesus on the road to Emmaus rebuked the disciples for being slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27) To Jesus, the scripture’s authority was permanent and absolute because of its divine origin. Arguments from Scripture, therefore, possessed for him clinching force. When he said, “it is written”, it was regarded as the final say on the matter.

Paul is also referring to the New Testament. Jesus indicated that his words, and those of his apostles, possessed the same character as the Old Testament, for they were the fulfillment of those Scriptures: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me... If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” (John 5:39,46) The apostles taught the same as Jesus: “Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.” (Acts 3:24) “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)

Christ promised the Spirit to the apostles so that they might remember and understand what he had taught them already. “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:25,26) More truth would be revealed to them which they could not understand until after his ascension and the coming of the Spirit in power. (John 16:12-14) The world would believe in him through their message (John 17:20), which would need to be written down in order to be transmitted.

The apostles of the New Testament, like the prophets in the Old Testament, were verbally inspired. “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” (1 Corinthians 2:13) They wrote the Lord’s commands. (1 Corinthians 14:37) That makes the writings of the New Testament as having the same authority as the Old Testament. Peter refers to Paul’s letters as being part of Holy Scripture: “just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom God gave him. He

writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures.” (2 Peter 3:15,16)

“All Scripture is God-breathed.” Scripture is brought into existence by the breath or Spirit of God. The human authors were “moved by the Holy Spirit and spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:21) That does not mean that the Spirit destroyed the individuality or the active cooperation of the human writers. God used people as they were to convey his message. But that message originated in God’s mind and was communicated from God’s mouth. That is why it is called the Word of God, for God spoke. The prophets used to say, ‘the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.’ The supernatural influence of God’s Spirit upon the biblical authors ensured that what they wrote was precisely what God intended them to write for the communication of his truth.

This is different from the inspiration of the creative artist. It does not imply an abnormal state of mind in the writer, e.g. a trance-state, or the obliteration of his personality. An inspired document could have been compiled from many sources by an ordinary process of historical and literary composition, or passed through various editions before reaching its final form. All that Paul claims is that the finished product is God-breathed, or inspired, precisely what God intended for the communication of saving truth.

But how can you say that the Bible is divinely inspired when there appears to be, for instance in the Old Testament, sub-Christian attitudes, actions and theological reflections? It is dangerous to take passages on their own without examining them in the context of Scripture as a whole, in the context in which they are written, and according to their literary genre. God has included in the Scriptures many examples, and some that have been recorded are bad examples. All is for our learning; but we must learn from different parts of Scripture in different ways. We learn from records of theological and practical error, not by thinking that because they are included that they met with God’s approval, but as a means of contrast and warning. Scripture must interpret scripture. Much that is included is not affirmed, but condemned. Each passage must be understood in the light of the truth as it is in Jesus.

The self-disclosure of God through the Old Testament was not only varied in form, but also partial in content. God progressively revealed himself bit by bit and stage by stage, each new stage building on those which had preceded it. The Old is in the New revealed. The New is in the Old concealed. We can only see the whole from the perspective of the finale at the end in its completion in Christ. The Holy Scriptures make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The inward witness of the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to discern the truth of God’s Word. St. Augustine wrote: “If we are perplexed by an apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is not allowable to say, ‘The author of the book is mistaken’; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood.”

The whole Bible is given to us, not for the sake of knowledge, but for salvation – to transform our lives. It is “useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straighten us out and helps us do what is right. It is God’s way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone.” (v.17 LB) It is given us, not just to read for information, but to act on, to incorporate into our daily lives. It should shape us, guide us, encourage us, and motivate us.

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