

NEW TESTAMENT STATEMENTS OF INSPIRATION

By Bernie Gillespie

© April 22, 1991 All Rights Reserved

II Tim. 3.14-17

- 14 But as for you, continue in those things you have learned and been convinced of, knowing from whom¹ you have learned [them].
- 15 and that from an infant you have known the Holy Writings², which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
- 16 All Scripture is God-breathed³, and is good⁴ for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.
- 17 that the man of God may be fully qualified⁵, having been equipped for every good work.

II Pet. 1.16-21

- 16 For we have not followed cleverly concocted myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.
- 17 For He received honor and glory from God the Father when a voice came to Him from the Magnificent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am⁶ well pleased."
- 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were⁷ with Him on the holy mountain.

1 *tinooon* - plural.

2 *hiera grammata* "holy writings" or "sacred letters"; in comparison to *graphe* (v.16) which is the typical word/phrase for the O.T. canonical books.

3 This is a literal rendering for *theopneustos*.

4 According to Bauer, Arndt, & Gingrich and Moulton-Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the N.T.*, "good" or "benefit" are the most common renderings for *ophelos*.

5 *aptios* - Moulton-Milligan, p.80a.

6 Aorist is constative, therefore translated in present tense.

7 Present participle, representing imperfect of *eimi*

- 19 We also hold the prophetic word⁸ with more certainty⁹, to which you would do well to attend to, as to a lamp shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;
- 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own¹⁰ interpretation,
- 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but men spoke from God¹¹ being impelled¹² by the Holy Spirit.

SCRIPTURE AND THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION

The two passages in view are highly important to the subject of biblical inspiration. The Christian faith rests on the authority of God itself. This authority extends to the Bible because it claims to be special communication from God. The nature and quality of this communication reflects directly upon its authority.

H. Ray Dunning believes that the three main issues of inspiration are: "(1) the fact of inspiration, (2) the mode of inspiration, and (3) the extent of inspiration"¹³. We should keep these issues in mind as we look at our two texts. The fruit of exegesis will help us to understand the significance of these issues, as well as, their importance and relationship to the subject of authority. It will also impact our faith concerning divine revelation and the

8 In Jewish usage applicable to any part of the O.T.

9 Most believe this is said as a result of the Transfiguration experience.

10 Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary*. vol. 50, Jude, II Peter, (Waco, TX: Word Books, Pub., 1983), pp.223-235. He gives extensive attention to this phrase.

11 The variants for this do not seem to merit affecting the text.

12 Bauckham, p. 233.

13 H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), p.65.

nature of God's communication with Mankind concerning salvation by Jesus Christ.

II TIM. 3:14-17

The first passage could be considered the first "measure" of the climax to this epistle. All that has come before it builds to this section which is firmly connected to the fourth chapter - the last "measure" of the climax. Paul is greatly concerned with false teachers and that "faithful men" (2:2) would "hold as a pattern of sound words" (1:13) what Paul taught, to counter the false teachers.

In verse 14 Paul exhorts Timothy to remain or continue in what he has learned from him. This is crucial because "in the last days" men will not believe and follow truth, but will increasingly deteriorate in faith and resist "sound doctrine" (4:3).

Paul pin-points the two sources of Timothy's learning: (1) his teachers(v 14), and (2) Scripture(v 16), which they taught him. He reminded Timothy in verses 10-12 of his life and teaching which stand as an example for him to follow. In verse 15 he reminds Timothy of the training given to him from his childhood (probably grandmother & mother). For this teaching and example the text was *hiera grammata* - the Scriptures.

To further emphasize Scripture as the foundation of his learning, Paul clearly states the distinctions of Scripture (*graphe*). (1) It is God-breathed, and (2) it is good for all the facets of ministry and Christian life. (Facets, I might add, formerly served by the prophets, priests, and sages). Now, Scripture is viewed as "inspired" in the way the prophets were called "inspired." Because it is "inspired," by holding to it, the true minister is fully qualified for apostolic ministry.

Timothy is charged to "preach the word (*logon*)" (4:2). This charge links immediately to the "charge" (3:14) to continue in the teaching of Scripture. It is the only guard or remedy against false teaching. The centrality of Scripture for the teacher of the Church was

expressed forcefully by Paul.

To Timothy the value and importance of Scripture was more the immediate issue than the fact of it's inspired-ness (though that is assumed as true by Paul). It was good for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in right living. It was able to make one wise unto salvation. Because Paul does not give a treatise on inspiration it would seem to indicate the assumption of it by Paul and Timothy. "Timothy is not therefore being informed of the inspiration of Scripture, for this was a doctrine commonly admitted by Jews, but he is being reminded that the basis of its profitableness lies in its inspired character."¹⁴

For us, who are concerned with the issues of inspiration, the phrase *pasa*¹⁵ *graphe theopneustos* is compelling. It is a unique reference in the N.T. Yet, while this is important, we need to put it in proper perspective. It states the fact of inspiration and the extent of inspiration. That it does not give the mode is not requisite.

We could address the use of *theopneustos* as a possible allusion to Gen 2:7. It could well be that Paul, or some Jewish tradition from which Paul draws, viewed inspiration as a creative act. In that, God gives man life by "breathing" into him. This is an act of the Spirit of God. So then, the work of God, when the "word of the LORD" comes, is a "breathing", or act of "in-Spiriting", to make the prophets words "live".

But, the mode seems moot at this point. Paul simply assumes that whatever mysterious manner God used to inspire the prophets, He also used it to inspire their writings. How the "in-Spiriting" happened is not articulated. The understanding of it is not so important as is the believing of it. The point is, that, Scripture should be considered on par

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980), p. 164.

¹⁵ Whether *pasa* should be translated "all" or "every" is not crucial. O.T. Scripture was considered a whole. Either would not change the essence. Cp. Donald Guthrie, *Ibid.*, p. 163f, for more in-depth reasons for this.

with the inspired-ness of the prophets and therefore should be believed as having the same authority.

In effect, Scripture reveals God (His word and thereby His Person) because it is "breathed out" or produced by God. Not only is the person speaking or writing "inspired," but so is the product of his inspiration. By means of this, it is effective, and thereby has authority to establish true teaching and reprove false teaching.

II PET. 1:16-21

The attention of II Peter is fixed on a similar concern as that of II Timothy. It is a "polemical document" with a purpose of responding to false teachers who question the Apostles teaching of the Parousia (the Second Coming of Christ).

To support this skepticism they held that the apostles, who undeniably preached the Parousia as central to the Christian message, had invented the idea themselves (1:16a), perhaps as an instrument of moral control. As for the passages of OT prophecy traditionally interpreted with reference to the Parousia, these were not divinely inspired but simply the prophets' own mistaken attempts to interpret their dreams and visions (1:20-21a).¹⁶

The writer of II Peter reacts fiercely to this. He makes it plain that they did not preach "cleverly concocted myth" when they preached the coming of Jesus. In fact, they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' Transfiguration. Because of their personal experience of the Transfiguration, they hold the "prophetic word" with more certainty. It is this prophetic word, synonymous with the OT Scripture, that should be viewed as having the ability to show the way like a light in a world of darkness. This claim asserts a respect for Scripture as the highest authority. It has revelational quality. It is effective to tell men the way to life.

Why? Because the prophetic word does not come from the prophet's (or apostle's) own being. It was produced when they spoke while being impelled or "moved" by the Spirit of

¹⁶ Bauckham, p.155.

God. The mode of inspiration is certainly not clear, nor apparently, pertinent. The fact of inspiration is crucial. The extent is also important, being implied when the reference is made to the whole OT by the phrase, "prophetic word."

The issue is the same for us as it was for Paul in II Timothy and the writer in II Peter. We must distinguish between true teaching and false teaching. How? By "sound words" which are "patterned" after those in Scripture. The only effective ministry is the one that holds to these sound words. Why? Because God has worked through men to produce these words and their teaching which is true. The Apostles believed Scripture, "is God-breathed" and "men spoke impelled by the Holy Spirit." Paul may even be implying that his words are inspired because they are sound words after the pattern of O.T. Scripture.

This being so, we can hold the "prophetic word" with more certainty. Scripture is the light of revelation from God shining in a murky place. It does not emanate from Humanity, but is "breathed out" (spoken) by God. Because it is "inspired," it has authority. Not only because it is a specific revealing of God, but because it is an "inspired" or God produced witness to the acts of revelation in salvation history. On this basis, Scripture is to be believed, trusted, and treated as authoritative and normative for the Church of all times and places. This remains so until the "dawning" of the return of Christ, Who is the living Word of God.