

## CHAIN REACTION BIBLE SUNDAY 2006

**BACKGROUND TO BIBLE READING****2 Timothy 3.14—4.5**

In the New Testament we have two letters addressed to Timothy. They provide us with a pen portrait of Paul's directions, encouragement and requests to Timothy. They also offer tantalising hints about the church that Timothy led, assumed by many to be Ephesus (see 1 Timothy 1.3).

One disturbing factor in this church is the presence of a number of false teachers. This helps us to understand the several references to Scripture and the teaching and traditions that Paul had given Timothy earlier. The other part of the picture is the constant need to equip converts and disciples properly.

Our key passage is one of these sections about Scripture. It shows the need for orthodox beliefs combined with authentic behaviour, especially for integrity from the leaders of the church – in this case, Timothy.

By "Scripture" Paul, of course, means what we refer to as the Old Testament (see Luke 24.44). But when we add in Paul's references to his own teachings and the traditions that have been passed on, it is probably not inappropriate to broaden this to include the New Testament as well.

Our passage ascribes two very important "outcomes" to Scripture:

- they lead to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (verse 15)
- they fully equip God's servants to lead a proper Christian life (verse 17)

In underlining these, the letter gives us profound insight about Scripture.

The pivotal insight is seen by many to be the beginning of verse 16, "All Scripture is inspired by God". Interestingly, the proper translation of this verse is problematic as can be seen by the alternative reading in GNB, "Every scripture inspired by God is..." It is doubtful whether the issue can be settled linguistically.<sup>1</sup> The key controversies include

- whether the whole of Scripture is defined as "inspired by God" or whether it is only those Scriptures which are "inspired by God" which are "useful". In other words, are the "God-inspired Scriptures" a sub-set of the whole of Scripture?

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<sup>1</sup> Those who want to research this further will need to consult several commentaries preferably based on the Greek text and from different decades.



- Whether the “all Scripture” means that any part of Scripture is only “useful” when it is read canonically, that is, within the context of the whole of the Bible.
- What is meant by “inspired by God” and further what is implied by it? Frustratingly, this is the only occurrence of this Greek word, so to some extent we are left guessing, beyond the general point that it means “God-breathed” (does God breathe into Scripture or out through it?) or more accurately “God-blown” as the second, verbal part of the word is always used of the wind and not of people in the New Testament (see Matthew 7.25; John 3.8).

What is clear and is important is that these Scriptures are useful or beneficial, when used properly. There are four ways in which they are useful:

- teaching – giving correct understanding of God and a Christian worldview
- reproof – showing what is incorrect belief
- correcting – indicating what is wrong behaviour
- instructing – commending good behaviour<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the letter makes a comprehensive claim – Scripture is vital for promoting a right understanding of God and how we are to live. Equally, it is valuable for showing us when we hold wrong views of God and showing what behaviour is in conflict with the Gospel. On the one hand, how we understand reality shapes the way we behave. On the other, our behaviour needs to cohere with our beliefs (see Matthew 7.24–27; Romans 12.1–2). Both creed and conduct are to be shaped by Scripture.

According to 2 Timothy, the Scriptures are not at an end in themselves. They are to empower God’s servants (probably meaning all Christians – the Greek is “the man of God”) to be “fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed”. There is a real stress on their adequacy and sufficiency for enabling us to live effective, transformed lives.

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<sup>2</sup> The NEB has a noteworthy translation (see J R W Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, IVP 1973, p.103!), “for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man of God may be efficient and equipped for good works of every kind.” What makes this noteworthy for us is that “the reformation of manners” was the second of the tasks which Wilberforce set himself – the other being, of course, the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. His enthusiastic support for the founding of Bible Society brings these together.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that Scripture is transmitted so that its potency is released. Verse 3.14 refers to the ways Timothy has absorbed Scripture and 4.1–2 to the need to pass this on effectively. Verse 2.2 amplifies this process and covers four “generations” of Christians: Paul – Timothy – people Timothy chooses – those whom these people teach. Verse 1.5 relates to his personal nurture through his grandmother and mother. Both depict a chain reaction, but it is not an automatic process. It requires Timothy (and all of us) to live passionate, sacrificial and Spirit-led lives, as Timothy’s family members and Paul had done.

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