

Dear Friends,

When unbelief--and unbelievers, including children of God who refuse to believe certain Biblical teachings--complicates a Biblical truth, faithful believers need to look to Scripture alone for the simplest possible teaching from its pages on that same idea. In this week's study, we examine a simple passage that simply states multiple facts regarding the giving and ongoing preservation of what we regard as "Scripture."

What is the simplest possible response to those who sincerely believe that God providentially directed the precise wording of Scripture, but then apparently left those writings to the fickle hands of men to preserve or to corrupt through subsequent generations? First, our study passage is a landmark passage that teaches not only the supernatural giving of "Scripture," but it equally teaches the supernatural preservation of those same Scriptures.

My second response would be to cite Jesus and inquire from Scripture of His own response to Old Testament Scriptures. In the writing, I refer to Jesus' citing Exodus 3:6 and emphasized God's use of the present tense verb, not a past tense verb. This simple fact alone wholly refuted the Sadducees' errant denial of life after death and a literal physical bodily resurrection. Further, in John 10:34-35, Jesus referred to Psalm 82:6, concluding, "...and the scripture cannot be broken." If Scripture's basic wording was lost, it is indeed broken. Folks, if He who directed the writing of Scripture, down to the precise words in which it is expressed, held such high regard for one Old Testament passage that Moses wrote some 1500 years earlier and another passage which David wrote some 1000 years earlier, His followers today face a clear choice. Follow His example and claim the present supernatural preservation of Scripture, or do not follow Him and claim that the original inspired words of Scripture have been lost or compromised by human flaws and frailty. I choose to follow Jesus' example, and I encourage you to do likewise.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Scripture's Source and Intended Audience

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:14-17 KJV 1900)

When things don't work as we expect, explanations and blame abound. I cannot offer an "Expert" opinion regarding the declining and anemic state of Christianity in our culture. However, I can go to my Bible and seek its explanations regarding the details of authentic faith as Scripture describes it, and that study exposes a frightening disconnect between Biblical faith and the populist ideas of Christian faith in our world today. Scripture only promises the Lord's blessings on His people when we follow His guide in Scripture faithfully. And that requires that we believe that His testimony in Scripture is faithful. Therein is

the problem of the day. Many professing Christians don't care enough about their faith to study Scripture, and others who read it don't believe it is God's faithful testimony to them. With this attitude, how can Christianity in our culture be anything other than anemic?

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. Timothy had learned with conviction many things which Paul urges him to faithfully continue believing and practicing. I've always been intrigued by "...*knowing of whom thou hast learned them.*" In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul names Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois who jointly trained Timothy in the Scriptures, presumably in his youth, the Old Testament Scriptures. It is possible that Paul intended them by this expression. It is also possible that he intended something far more significant even than those godly ancestors.

Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7 KJV)

If Timothy "Considered" those Old Testament Scriptures in his youth, it is quite likely that the Lord gave him understanding in those teachings, meaning that the Lord taught Timothy from those Scriptures far more fully and clearly than the most devoted of mothers or grandmothers.

What were those Scriptures that Timothy learned from his mother and grandmother in his youth? Since his youth predated New Testament Scriptures, we must conclude that he learned from the Old Testament. Likely, in a predominantly Greek-speaking culture, and with a Gentile father, Timothy may well have learned from the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament of that age. Paul wrote of Timothy's learning, as well as of "*the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*" Obviously, Paul's perspective of the Old Testament when he wrote Timothy was vastly different from his pre-Damascus-Road perspective of those writings.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable. Paul's reference quite likely intended to include both Old and New Testament Scriptures. Take careful note of this language. I grieve when I hear self-professed "Conservative" Christians refer to this verse, but change the meaning dramatically. They frequently change the present tense, "*is given,*" to past tense, "*was given* in the original autographs." Simply stated, they apply these words to the human writer's original document, but freely confess that copyists and translators made grave errors that materially altered the meaning of subsequent copies or translations, so that the Bible you hold in your hands is not "inspired of God," and so is not of reliable profit to the believer. They proceed from this compromised outlook to freely claim that you must read the Bible and choose which passages continue to communicate God's true message and which ones fail. What is their ultimate and final authority for "Scripture" in this mindset? It is their own personal opinion. In this confused world with no final authority, we fall headlong into utter relativism. You view passages A, C, and F as yet preserved and inspired, while I view them as corrupted, but I view passages B, E, and H as preserved and inspired. Nothing short of confusion and bewildered private philosophies can survive such a state.

By "*all scripture,*" Paul expands his perspective of "Scripture" to a much broader perspective. Consider New Testament references to "Scripture" in this broader perspective. In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul, in

one verse, referred to what “Scripture” says, citing from Moses **and from Luke’s gospel**. Even at that early date, Paul recognized the supernatural quality of Luke’s gospel and regarded it equally with Moses’ writings as “Scripture.” In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter referred to Paul’s writings, as well as “**other scriptures**.” When you hear someone attempt to devalue the New Testament as the product of a “Church council” many generations after that first generation of believers, do not believe them. Both passages affirm that wise godly men in the first generation of Christians already recognized Luke’s, Paul’s, and other writings as “Scripture,” just as we do today. The writings we refer to as the New Testament did not gain this distinction by a later church council. Those early believers regarded these writings as self-attesting, that they bore their own internal witness that they were supernatural in their origin and content from the beginning.

Did translators make mistakes? Absolutely. However, a study of those editions and translations of the Bible will reveal that a faithful Bible reading—Bible studying—community of believers immediately compared new editions or translations to their old reliable ones. When they discovered unacceptable errors, they immediately published those errors from the roof top. I love an example. A new edition of the King James Bible was released. Almost immediately, the diligent Bible reading community discovered a glaring problem. The printer omitted “Not” in one of the Ten Commandments. “Thou shalt **not** commit adultery” was printed as “Thou shalt commit adultery.” This edition soon was branded, “The adulterer’s Bible.” And just as soon it also disappeared from public view. I have no problem with a proper name that is spelled differently in two edition. Either spelling takes you to the same person and teaches the same lesson. If we are to accept the actual wording of our study verse, we must accept the present tense verb, “**is given by inspiration of God**,” and hold that the same wise and gracious providence that provided a reliable Bible to the Lord’s people a hundred years ago—or a thousand years ago—intends to provide an equally reliable Bible to His people today. How many times in the gospels did Jesus refer to Old Testament Scriptures and affirm the precise meaning of the text that could be learned from either the original writing or the recent translation?

...and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Paul did not write, “...might or might not be profitable.” He wrote the clear affirming “**is profitable**.” Again, he used the present tense verb. Consider one notable example from Jesus Himself. In each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), when Jesus responded to the trick question of the Sadducees, He didn’t engage them in a convoluted philosophical debate. He quoted one of the simplest verses in the Old Testament, from Exodus, Chapter 3. He framed His whole reply to them on the fact that Moses quoted God on the mountain in the present tense. God didn’t tell Moses, “I was the God of” his forefathers. He told Moses, “**I am**” their God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had all been dead for many generations. However, God affirmed that He “**Is**” their God at the very moment He spoke those words to Moses. He could only be their God at that time if they continued to live with Him in glory at that time, and that simple fact refuted the whole concept of the Sadducees. In the Hebrew written language, the difference between present tense and past tense was a tiny mark, similar to our apostrophe. Moses lived and wrote those first five Books of the Old Testament around 1500 BC. **Jesus confidently claimed the preservation and accuracy of this tiny mark across multiple copies and fifteen hundred years!** If we follow Jesus, we need to show just as much respect for His Book, for Scripture, as He showed for it.

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Accepting the supernatural origin and preservation of Scripture, we now follow this treasure trove revelation of Scripture to the next question. **To Whom is Scripture addressed?** Paul answers the question as simply as words can communicate, “**...that the man of God may be...**” It seems that a person’s preconceptions regarding God and salvation often drive them to their own conclusion regarding this question. If you

believe salvation is accomplished either by your own works or by a hybrid blend of your works and God's aid, you are inclined to ignore Paul's answer and believe that Scripture's primary intended audience is lost sinners. You will make every admonition to godliness and faith in the Bible a condition to salvation. When you face the need for godly directions to face problems, trials, or discouragement in your life, you will think the Bible provides little instruction to help you. However, if you believe that God securely and wholly saved you by His loving grace, making you now a beloved member of His family, you are more inclined to accept Paul's inspired answer to the question and to see wise instruction for your life on every page in the Bible.

...*perfect*. Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament defines the Greek word translated "perfect" in this verse as "to equip, to regulate." Louw-Nida defines the word as "qualified to perform some function." Not only did the Lord provide Scripture as a guide for life and faith to His family, to "the man of God," but He made doubly sure that it provides everything we need to know how to "Perform the function(s)" of "***all good works***." Why do pastors who regard Scripture with this high esteem invest so much time repeatedly urging their members to not only believe but also to practice what Scripture teaches? Scripture is not a compilation of good advice by godly men from the past. ***It is God's personal instruction book for His people***. If we long for the peace and joy which Scripture describes in the faithful believer, we need constantly to remind ourselves. Scripture teaches us precisely how to obtain it. Practice what God teaches us in its pages. Nothing more—nothing less.

Elder Joe Holder