Every Scripture Inspired of God

J W. Roberts

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Every Scripture Inspired of God

J. W. Roberts

One of the most important passages for ascertaining the Bible's claim for itself is 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. Its very wording is however somewhat difficult, and consequently there has been much discussion on its meaning. The following is my own understanding of what Paul meant by it.

The passage is rendered in the King James Version "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

The American Standard renders, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable . . ." It would appear from this difference in translation that the difficulties are in the words "all" or "every" and in the placing of the copula or verb "is." The fact that the verb is italicized in both versions indicates that it is in ellipsis (understood) in the context. The question is simply, Is the adjective "inspired of God" attributive or is it predicative? There has been a debate also on the meaning of the adjective itself: is it objective (meaning breathed by God) or subjective (meaning breathing the spirit of God)? We shall attempt to present the evidence for the decision on these points and their significance.

First let us note the context. In contrast to the absurdities of the false teachers referred to in the previous passages (verses 3-9 and 13), Paul urges Timothy to remember the things that he has been taught, "knowing of whom thou hast learned them." He would have Timothy to "abide" or stay (continue) in these things. What he means particularly started back with the teaching which Timothy had received as an infant or babe where he was taught the sacred writing. The term "sacred writings" (hiera grammata) designates unquestionably the Jewish canonical books known to us as the Old Testament. The word grammata literally means letter (of the alphabet), but like the Latin litera it means an epistle or document in the plural (collective) form. The term "sacred" is used of the reverence or veneration of these books in the eyes of Jews and Christians. "Holy" writings would refer to the holiness or purity of such. These Jewish writings differed from common or secular writings and were held in veneration as the "oracles" of God, hence the term "sacred writings."

It is quite plain that it is the Jewish Scriptures which are meant. When Timothy was a babe his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5) had only the Jewish Scriptures on which to nurture him. His birth must be placed by any reckoning about A.D. 30.

Paul affirms that these sacred writings to which he referred are the specific ones which are able to make Timothy wise unto salvation.
through the faith which is in Christ. The adjective phrase translated “which are able” is in an emphatic attributive position on Greek. Salvation begins to be revealed in the Old Covenant, but it can be understood and appropriated only by the Gospel revealed in the New Covenant. The Old Testament Scriptures “bear witness to” Jesus (John 5:39).

It is this very point that serves as the background of the next verse, the one we are interested in. Not the Old Testament alone, but “every Scripture” inspired in the same manner as the Old Testament, may be used as religiously profitable, for the Christian. This seems in the context to be the very point into which Paul is leading. There are other Scriptures besides the Jewish or Old Testament Scriptures which Timothy was taught in infancy, and they too are important for instruction.

It is important to note that the term “Scripture” has a technical meaning in the Bible. Arndt and Gingrich in the new Greek English Lexicon point out (as do all authorities which have been checked on the point) that the term graphe (“Scripture”) is used in the New Testament always to denote the sacred writings of a religious nature and the O. T. Scriptures in particular. The concept is that of canonicity, and an essential point in that conception is that such canonical Scriptures are inspired and therefore authoritative. Furthermore, in every N. T. use the singular term means a single passage of scripture. ¹

The rule of Greek as expressed by Souter’s lexicon is that pas as an adjective in the singular without the article means every or every kind of; in the singular with the article preceding or following it means the whole, all the; in the plural without the article it means all. Thus “every scripture” is the expected translation. “All scripture” would be possible if scripture could have the collective sense.

¹Consider the following from J. B. Lightfoot’s St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (London, Macmillan Co., 1876):

The following facts seem to show that the singular graphe in the N. T. always means a particular passage of Scripture; (1) where the reference is clearly to the sacred writings as a whole, as in the expressions, “searching the scriptures,” “learned in the scriptures,” etc. the plural graphai is universally found, e.g., Acts xvii. 11, xviii. 24, 28. (2) We meet with such expressions as “another scripture” (Joh. xix.37), “this scripture” (Luke iv.21), “every scripture” (2 Tim. iii. 16). (3) he graphe is most frequently used in introducing a particular quotation, and in the very few instances where the quotation is not actually given, it is for the most part easy to fix the passage referred to . . . The biblical usage is followed also by the earliest fathers. The transition from the “Scriptures” to the “Scripture” is analogous to the transition from Ta biblia to the “Bible.”

So also Abbott-Smith, Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament: graphe: “In plural when the sacred writings as a whole are means, e.g., Mt. 21:42 etc.; in sing., when a particular passage is referred to, as in Lk. 4:21 . . . .”
of “every passage of scripture taken together.” But we have seen
that it is always used of the individual passage and never in the
collective sense. Hence strictly speaking “all scripture” is some­
what of a solecism in the N. T. Paul certainly means “every passage
of Scripture.”

Mr. R. M. Spence demonstrated long ago (Expository Times, 8,
1896, 563f) that the correct translation of the pasa graphe “every
scripture” here with the adjective theopneustos (“God inspired”) is
“every God-inspired Scripture.” There are twenty-one instances in
the New Testament in which pas is used to modify a noun which
is immediately followed by another adjective as in 2 Tim. 3:16. In
every case the Greek order of words is (1) pas, (2) the noun, and (3)
the adjective. Typical examples are “every good tree” (Matt. 7:17);
“every idle word” (Matt. 12:36); “every spiritual blessing” (Eph.
1:3); “every good gift” (James 1:17). The other examples are Acts
25:1; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 4:29; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:17; 2 Tim. 2:21;
4:18; Titus 1:16; 2:10; 3:1; Heb. 4:12; James 3:16; Rev. 8:7; 18:
2; 12: 21:19. The one place where the translations have “all” is
Titus 2:10 where the context shows that the word pas means “per­
fect” or “complete” faith. Where the noun is the subject of the
sentence the verb follows the adjective which is attributive as in
James 1:17 “every perfect gift is from above.” In no case of this
usage is the adjective separated from the noun so as to be taken as
a predicate.

The natural conclusion is that our passage then should be trans­
lated “Every God-inspired Scripture is also profitable.” Since, as
we have shown, “Scripture” in the Biblical sense implies inspira­
tion, many commentators have insisted that to say “every scripture
is inspired” would be redundancy.

Paul does not mean that there are some Scriptures which are not
inspired of God. An uninspired “Scripture” would not be “Script­
ure.” Nor does he mean that every “writing” of kinds other than
“Scripture” in the technical sense as used elsewhere in N. T. is in­
spired of God. He means that every book and passage of Scripture
(both Old and New Testament) given by the inspiration of God
is (because of that inspiration) profitable for the uses described.

B. S. Simpson has lately made a defense of the other reading: “All
Scripture is inspired of God.” It will help to clear the matter to
examine his treatment. He recognizes that the matter as a whole is
partly determined by the meaning of the noun with pas (pasa graphe).
Simpson admits that the “rule” is that the anarthrous noun with
pas means “every.” However he says that in view of such passages
as Acts 2:36; Eph. 2:21; 3:15; Col. 4:12 the rule seems to admit of
exceptions. Even these examples are not certain. Acts 2:36 could
be as easily rendered “every house of Israel.” Eph. 2:21 is rendered
“every part of the building” by Goodspeed. Both Goodspeed and the
RSV render Eph. 3:15 “every family.” In any case where the
translation should be "all" or "the whole" it would be not by rule but where the context demanded it.

Still one would concede Simpson's point. The exceptions surely exist. His references do not, however, parallel 2 Tim. 3:16 for here we have the adjective added to *pasa graphe* in a way that none of his references have. We have already shown that the majority of the N. T. references in such cases have the sense of "every."

Simpson mentions four objections to the "adjectival interpretations." (What he really means is the predicative interpretation, for "God-inspired" is adjectival in either case; the question is whether it is attributive or predicative.) These are:

"(1) The tautological effect, upon this construction, of the rest of the sentence. Surely *every* God-breathed Scripture is *useful, etc.* presents a curious specimen of anticlimax." On the contrary we have shown above how it fits the context exactly. With the term Scripture implying inspiration, "All scripture is inspired of God" is itself tautology.

"(2) If that version be correct, *theopneustos* should more fitly precede *graphe." In this Simpson is definitely wrong. In the twenty-one instances cited above where the meaning is uniformly "every" and where the noun is also modified by an adjective, the adjective *always* follows the noun, not precedes it as Simpson claims.

"(3) Paul has a confirmed habit of dropping the copula, particularly in an opening clause of a sentence (cf. 1 Tim. 1:8, 15, etc.). We find a close parallel to this passage in 1 Tim. iv. 4, where no one translates 'every good creature of God is also not one of them to be rejected'." Paul does often omit the copula. However 1 Tim. 1:8, 15 are not germane for they are instances of predicate adjectives used with nouns with the article, quite a different situation. In them the copula would be quite ungrammatical. Actually the question is not that Paul omits the copula, for the copula must be inserted in either interpretation. The questions is where the "is" goes, either before the adjective "God-inspired" or after it.

The citation of 1 Tim. 4:4 is the only really pertinent bit of evidence in Simpson's treatment. Here the context, contrary to the rule, demands the alternate translation: "every creature of God is good." The reading "every good creature of God" is made impossible in the context by the presence of *oude*. If such a condition existed in 2 Tim. 3:16, we would be forced to concede. But what we look for in exegesis is not what it "could mean," but what is most grammatical and contextual.

"(4) The fourth evidence is that Chrysostom understands the adjective as predicative. This evidence is offset by other equally learned interpreters. The rendering which we have adopted was that adopted by Origen (Hom. xx. *in Joshuam. Philocal. c. 12*), by the Syriac (according to Wordsworth), and the Vulgate: "*Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata utilis est.*" (So many Latin MSS and most of the early Latin Fathers according to Wordsworth, though
Wordsworth and White omit the est thus retaining the original elipsis.

The other point needs some mention. The claim has been made that “inspired of God” is active, meaning “breathing the inspiration of God.” This would naturally mean that the Scriptures merely contain an inspiration of God which they impart to the individual. The other possibility is that the term is objective and means that the scriptures are writings which themselves have been given by God’s inspiration.

A. T. Robertson discusses the question at length in his *Historical Grammar* and seems to demonstrate the passive meaning. Lenski shows that in all instances of verbals formed of the noun theos ("God") in the unabridged Greek lexicon of Liddell-Scott only one is active and that due to the nature of the verb’s meaning from which the verbal is taken. In all others God is the agent. Thus here the verbal must mean “given by inspiration of God” as the paraphrase in the Common Version has it.

The passage then means that in addition to the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament which Timothy had known from a babe and which were able to make him wise unto salvation through the faith in Christ Jesus there are other (Christian) Scriptures which deserve the name Scripture and that they being likewise inspired of God are profitable for doctrine, reproof, instruction in righteousness and furnish the man of God completely unto every good work.

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THE J. W. McGARVEY AWARD

By a vote of the members of the board of the Restoration Quarterly the J. W. McGarvey award is given this year to Dr. Frank Pack for his contribution “A Study of Papyrus Bodmer II (P66).”

This award is made possible by Abilene Christian College through the generosity of a friend who wishes to honor both the college and the Quarterly. A check for $100 has been given to Dr. Pack.

Another article by the same writer, “The ‘Western’ Text of Acts” was also mentioned prominently in the evaluation. The two other articles receiving the most votes behind the winning article were “The Speeches of Acts in Recent Study” by Roy Bowen Ward and “The Textual Authority for John 7:53-8:11” by Fausto Salvoni of Milan, Italy.

It is the hope of the donors of this award that it will stimulate a wider range of contributions to the Quarterly. A broader selection of quality materials is still needed. The rules of the award are:

“1) The article must be (1) objective, (2) must not deal in personalities, (3) must be scholarly, i.e., must be up to date in bibliography, not overly dependent on one book, must face a specific problem and handle it constructively.”

We solicit the continued contribution of those interested in seeing our journal grow.

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