

06. 2 Timothy 3:10-17





## 2 Timothy 3:10

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.

There is nothing self-centred in Paul's offering himself as an example. He knows full well by whose love and power he has remained faithful. Rather, he is appealing to the bond of affection and faith between himself and Timothy in order to encourage Timothy to remain faithful to his commission. Timothy had lived with Paul, worked with him, and learned from him.



## 2 Timothy 3:11-12

my persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in the Messiah Jesus will be persecuted.

Paul's memories go back to the difficulties he had to bear on his first missionary journey, at Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (Acts 14:5), and at Timothy's home town, Lystra (Acts 14:19-20). The stoning Paul suffered at Lystra (2 Corinthians 11:25) may well have been witnessed by Timothy as a young lad (see also 1:5). Living a Christian life meant persecution for Paul.

As he wrote to the Thessalonians: 'When we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know' (1 Thessalonians 3:4).



Jesus had said: 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Matthew 5:11-12).

When Jesus loved he challenged whatever was not true and not just. He was crucified. When Paul carried out the mission given him by Jesus, he challenged those who thought of salvation as their privilege. He also challenged much that was unloving in his culture. He is writing from prison and awaiting death because of it.



## 2 Timothy 3:13-14

But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.

One cannot expect to take sides with the poor, neglected and powerless against the injustice and abuse of power that oppresses them, without encountering opposition. One who is ‘**living a religious life in the Messiah Jesus**’ (3:12) is an instrument of Jesus’ liberating love in the world, and wields enormous power – the power of God. But it is a love-power, and so is powerful to convert, but not to subdue by force one who would resist it.



## 2 Timothy 3:15

From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in the Messiah Jesus.

Though the expression ‘sacred writings’ (ἱερὰ γράμματα) is not found in the Old Testament as a way of speaking of the Torah and other writings sacred to the Jews, it is an expression found in Hellenistic Judaism. In his letter to the Romans 1:2, Paul refers to these writings as the ‘holy scriptures’ (γραφαὶ ἁγίαι).

Though Timothy’s father was not a Jew, and though he was not circumcised as a child (see Acts 16:1-3), his mother had introduced him to the Scriptures. Paul’s statement that they can ‘instruct’ (σοφίζω, ‘make wise’) provides a good balance to his criticism elsewhere of the false use of Scripture (see Titus 1:14; 1 Timothy 1:4).



The scriptures are fulfilled in Jesus, and so, when read in the light of the faith that is given to us through our communion with Jesus, they can guide us to salvation: ‘Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope’ (Romans 15:4).

Paul goes on to expand on this idea.



## 2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

It is God who has sent his Spirit to inspire the writers of the various passages that are read in the synagogue and in the Christian church. If a passage of scripture (γραφή) is read in the Spirit in which it has been written, we will find in it the inspired wisdom that can be used to teach, to help a sinner to recognise his sin and repent and so be restored to a better life. Scripture can also help us to follow God's discipline which leads to true righteousness.



Witnessing to the value of the sacred writings is the fact that, not only were they accepted by the community as expressing aspects of their communion with God, but they were also copied, treasured and handed on by those who wished their children to know the wonderful things that God had done and was continuing to do in their midst. The community that received, cherished and preserved the scriptures did so because they found them inspiring and because they recognised the truth of their own spiritual experience in them.



Paul is constantly quoting from these sacred writings, because of their inherent value and because he wishes to show how the spirituality expressed in them has flowered in Jesus. In his First Letter to Timothy, he exhorted him: 'Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching' (1 Timothy 4:13).

The sacred writings of the Hebrew Bible continue to reveal aspects of God to us, and something of ourselves in relation to God, to the world and to each other.



As we read the Sacred Scriptures we recall Jesus' words: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name I shall be there with them' (Matthew 18:20). It is essential that we read the Scriptures in his company and with his eyes for 'Jesus is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' (Hebrews 7:25).

However inspired and however inspiring we remember Jesus' warning: 'It was said to you of old, but I say to you' (Matthew 5:21-38).

The Scriptures are human documents. They include images of God that fall short of what Jesus knew God to be. They speak of enemies of Israel assuming they are also enemies of God, and we are invited to pray that God will destroy them. Jesus' attitude and behaviour is in stark contrast. He tells us to love our enemies, because God loves them (see Matthew 5:44-48).



The psalmist states that sinners are to be avoided. Jesus teaches that we are not to hate sinners, for that would mean hating ourselves. We are to love sinners with God's love.

God is frequently portrayed as being angry and vengeful.

In Jesus' well-known parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31), the father is anything but angry with his wayward boy. He was longing for his return and when the boy did come home, the father welcomes him with love.



The psalmist looked forward to the coming of God's Messiah who would 'break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel' (Psalm 2:9). This contradicts everything we know of Jesus.



It is important to pause to examine the nature of religious texts





## God's revelation and religious texts

The point I wish to make here is fundamental to the study of any and every religious text. I believe that God reveals God's Self to everyone. A person becomes aware of this when he or she has an insight into the **Mystery**, the **Sacred Presence** we call **God**. Whoever we are, and this applies to Moses and Jesus and Muhammad, when we give expression to a religious insight, the expression comes from us. Whether or not we or others view this expression as inspired by God it is still a human expression of religious insight, and as such it carries with it the limitations inherent in any language. It must be understood within the context of the situation in which the revelation occurs.



That religious texts, judged to be 'inspired' are still human texts is fundamental to the study of any and every religious text.

God reveals God's Self to everyone. A person becomes aware of this when he or she has an insight into the Mystery, the Presence we call God.

Whoever we are when we give expression to a religious insight, the expression comes from us.

The words will be inspired to the extent that they come from a genuine communion with God and are sensitive to the movement of God's Spirit inspiring them.



What do we mean when we say that words of the Bible are inspired?

1. We are not saying that an *outside God* puts words in the author's mind.
2. We experience God when we experience our own heart in communion with reality, and so with God. Texts are said to be inspired when they are judged to be in touch with reality and to come from an enlightened heart.
3. The words are said to be inspired and are treasured and handed on because they speak to our heart, and are judged to come from the prophet's heart-communion with God.
4. This is not true of all their words, for at times their words reveal the limits of the author's insights and the biases of those who treasured and handed on their words.



We are assured by hundreds of years of praying the psalms that they are indeed inspired by God. At the same time they are still human expressions of religious insight. They must be understood within the context of the situation in which the revelation was received.



The history of religious thought reveals that there are people of every religious persuasion who, rather than take the trouble to examine religious texts in their context, prefer, for reasons of security and power, to take the texts as coming directly from God.

This seems to give the text a divine and unalterable aura. It might appear to offer more security, 'knowing' what God is revealing without having to take the trouble to check our thinking.

It is certainly easier not to have to work to discover what the human author intended to say, and how the text was understood by those to whom it was addressed. Security, ease, and power can be very tempting.

We would do well to listen to Jesus as he tells us: 'the truth will set you free' (John 8:43).



The Gospels and the Letters of the New Testament are responses to Jesus.

Christians continue to treat Jesus' words and actions found in the Gospels with the greatest respect for they offer a privileged window into the way Jesus' disciples came to see him.

However, we believe that it is Jesus himself who reveals God. Christianity is not a 'Religion of the Book'. It is a Religion of a Person, Jesus.

The words of the New Testament point to Jesus. They are written by people who, while in many ways transcending their culture, were still limited human beings with limited insight. God inspires limited human beings, for that is what we are.



Raymond Brown (Theological Studies 1981)

‘The Bible is the literary objectification of a faith that is a response to revelation’(page 9).

He goes on to define Scripture as: ‘divine revelation to which human beings have given expression in words’(page 13).



## Schmaus, Dogma I, 188

‘What we encounter in the Sacred Scriptures is first of all the objectivization of the belief in and understanding of Christ which was possessed by the Church or the local congregation.

In other words it is the answer to the revelation of God. In this answer, however, the word of God itself is expressed, for this word has entered into the answer of the Church and is effective in it. On the other hand we must not forget that God’s word, which enters into our human answer of faith, nevertheless always transcends it.’



## Hans Urs von Balthasar

‘While for an older theology Scripture was seen to be God’s Word to the Church, for more recent theology it is primarily the expression of faith’s reflection on historical revelation. It is possible to see both things in their unity.’

‘The Bible is a word from the ineffable ... so one must not pay attention one-sidedly to the form of the Bible as word, but rather above all to the ‘approach-roads’ to God indicated by the Bible’ (Balthasar 7. 266-267).



We believe that Jesus is the perfect human expression of God's Word, God's Self-revelation. Jesus' words and actions, recorded in the Gospels, take us into the heart of Jesus, into his prayer-communion with God. His words and his deeds are a precious gift, for they give expression to his person, and to his intimate communion with God whom he addressed as 'Abba' ('My dear Father'; Mark 14:36).

We are graced to share Jesus' experience, 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6; see Romans 8:15). 'Our Father in heaven' (Matthew 6:9).



Jesus experienced himself as God's 'Son'. 'The Father and I are one' (John 10:30).

'All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27). This love gave authority to his teaching and to the healing power to his ministry.

Jesus wanted to share this intimacy, this love, with everyone.

'May they be one, Father, as we are one' (John 17:11). 'May they all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21).





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The point I wish to establish here is that if we are to pray the Sacred Scriptures as disciples of Jesus, if we are to pray the words with Jesus, we need to check that the image of God presented reflects the way Jesus sees God. Only then can it be Christian prayer.

When this is not the case we must listen to Jesus as he says: 'It was said to you of old, but I say to you!'



While reason and logic cannot comprehend reality, they must be respected. Revelation goes beyond reason, but cannot contradict reason.

Any religious group that claims that its holy texts come directly from God, bypassing the limitations of the person who conveys the words, is failing to appreciate the reality of inspiration. People live at a certain period of history, in a certain culture and with a certain language. When an inspired person gives expression to the inspiration in words, the words are human and need to be understood in context.