

(2) INSPIRATION and INTERPRETATION of NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

AN EXPANDED DEFINITION OF SCRIPTURE:

In the first study on this topic we adopted a narrow interpretation of the word 'Scripture,' which limited its application exclusively to the Old Testament. This was because the Scriptures studied were prefaced by remarks that referred specifically to the Hebrew canon. For instance, Paul prefaced his instructions to Timothy with the words, **"..you have known the Holy Scriptures."** We therefore looked at the following phrases in that context.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.."

"..no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.."

"..holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." :

However the inclusion of the New Testament writings in the Christian Bible requires a review of that earlier narrow definition. The following readings indicate that during their lifetimes, both Paul and Peter were already expanding the scope of what could be considered authoritative and reliable.

Paul

Paul was closely associated with the author of Luke's Gospel and mentioned him often in his letters. He called him **"Luke the beloved physician.."** in Colossians 4:14, and referred to him as one of **"..my fellow labourers."** in Philemon 24. There is also a haunting reference to Luke at the end of Paul's last letter to Timothy, when from his prison in Rome he reported, **"Only Luke is with me."** (2 Timothy 4:11).

In these circumstances it is not unreasonable to assume that Paul was already quite familiar with the writings of his companion, which covered the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in 'The Gospel According to Luke, and the ministry and experience of the Early Church in 'The Acts of the Apostles.' His direct quotation from these writings confirms their place in Scripture.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-18 The author Paul is writing to Timothy near the end of his ministry. In his letter he deliberately equates a verse from the Old Testament and a verse from the New Testament, calling them both Scripture.

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' [which is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 25:4 in the Old Testament] and, 'The labourer

is worthy of his wages.’ [which is a direct quote from Luke 10:7 in the New Testament]”

Peter

2 PETER 3:1-2, 14-16 In this reading the apostle Peter equates the commandment of the apostles with the writings of the prophets, and then goes on to include the letters of Paul as part of Scripture.

“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour ... - as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”

THE COMMANDMENT OF US THE APOSTLES

COMMANDMENT is a frequently used word in the Bible, there being a number of Hebrew and Greek words with slightly different meanings that are translated ‘commandment’ in English.

One of these is the Greek word ‘*epitage*,’ which is used by Paul in some of his letters. The basic meaning of ‘*epitage*’ is ‘an authoritative command’--as in the ‘Ten Commandments.’ Paul uses it in this manner in the following readings.

“..according to the commandment of the everlasting God..” (Ro 16:26)

“..by the commandment of God our Saviour..” (1 Tim1:1)

“..according to the commandment of God our Saviour..” (Titus 1:3)

There is no doubt about the authority attached to his commands, because Paul is sure he is speaking with the authority of God.

But there are also instances where the apostle seems less sure of his ground:

- **“But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. For I wish that all men were even as I myself [ie celibate].”** (1 Cor 7:6-7).
- **“Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one in whom the Lord in his mercy has made trustworthy.”** (1 Cor 7:25).
- **“I speak not by commandment ... in this I give my advice ... [regarding taking up a collection of money as a gift]”** (2 Cor 8:8,10).

In these cases Paul is openly admitting that he is stating his own opinion. And while his opinion carries considerable weight in the church (as the words of “**..one in whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy..**”), it needs to be clearly distinguished from “**..the commandment of the everlasting God..**” As Paul says of his own words, “**..in this I give my advice..**” The words of the apostles only become ‘**the commandment of us the apostles**’ when they are obediently declaring those words that have their origin in God.

While the personal wisdom and advice of the apostles may be quite appropriate for their immediate audience, and to the specific circumstances in which they were first applied, they should not be regarded as authoritative commands. For instance, Paul did not command all men to be celibate, nor virgins not to marry. He was expressing his opinion as one who has wisdom in the Lord. However his whole attitude towards marriage in 1 Cor 7 was coloured by his belief that “**the time is short.**” It was on these grounds that he advised, “**from now on even those who have wives should be as though they have none.**” (1 Cor 7:29). These circumstances highlight the need to distinguish whether the author is writing words that carry the authority of almighty God, or is expressing his own opinion.

This does not give us license to dilute the commandments of God spoken by the apostles. For instance, the command, “**wives, submit to your own husbands,**” has its origins in God’s judgment of Eve; is illustrated throughout the Old Testament; and is commanded by the apostles Paul and Peter. It should therefore be considered as a commandment given with the authority of God.

Once again, we need to look beyond the personality of the prophet/apostle, and into the ‘word’ itself. Whose authority does it carry--at this time, and to me? The apostle’s, or his Master? The context of a sentence or phrase may help to some extent, but in the final analysis it is only the continuing witness of the Holy Spirit that affirms Scripture to men’s hearts.

Of course, this sort of an argument seems very subjective, and even dangerous. After all, what guarantee does this give to those who want a rock-solid safeguard against ever being deceived by false doctrine? The short answer is that there is none (except perhaps a very humble and dependent heart!).

Even though the Bible is the word of God, it is still only a collection of words written by different people until it is quickened to us by the Holy Spirit as He wills. No amount of logical analysis or historical research can ever reveal the spiritual truths of God’s Word to us.

As Paul says: “**..no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God..**” And he goes on to say, “**..we have received ... the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God ... we have the (revelation of the) mind of Christ (by the Spirit).**” (1 Cor 2:11,12,16).

YOU HAVE AN ANOINTING FROM THE HOLY ONE

ANOINTING in this quote from 1 John 2:20 is a 'metonym' or code-word for the Holy Spirit. The apostle John is saying that we have received 'an anointing'-that is to say we have received the Holy Spirit - from the Holy One, who is Jesus Christ. And because of that, we **"..know all things.."**

The full passage reads as follows: **"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth ...These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing [or Holy Spirit] which you have received from Him [Jesus Christ] abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing [the Holy Spirit] teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it [the Holy Spirit] has taught you, you will abide in Him [Jesus Christ]."** (1 Jo 2:18-21,26-27).

To Know

The first thing to be dealt with from this passage, is the emphasis placed on the word 'know.' This a key word because in a way it sums up the purpose of these studies. To explore 'the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture' is in reality to ask the question, 'How do I know this word is from God?'

There are several Greek words which are translated in the English Bible by the word 'know.' They cover a range of meanings, from having an intellectual understanding of a subject, to knowledge gained from personal intimacy. In this case '*oida*' is used, which has the underlying sense of having 'seen' or 'perceived.'

You will recall that this is a very similar concept to that experienced by the Old Testament prophets; who initially 'saw' the word of God as a 'perception' in their spirit, and later expressed that revelation in language.

Here we have the Holy Spirit working in a similar manner—but this time for those who are confronted with the written word, and need to establish its source. Because the believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, he has the inherent capacity to interpret a Scripture, or a prophetic word, or a spiritual teaching, and discern whether its source is divine or demonic. He 'knows' because the Holy Spirit enables him to 'see.' When the apostle John says, **"you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things,"** he

is not suggesting that we have unlimited knowledge. He is saying that because we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we are able to 'see' or discern spiritual truth.

To Abide

The second aspect to be gleaned from the reading is the emphasis on the word 'abide,' and more specifically its endorsement of our goal to **"abide in Him."**

The relevant verse says that **"the anointing,"** whom we know to be the Holy Spirit, and whom we also know we received from Jesus Christ, **"abides in you..."** It concludes that **"just as it [the Holy Spirit] has taught you, you will abide in Him [who gave 'it' to you-- ie Jesus Christ]."**

The nature of abiding is brought out in Verse 24, where the Greek word '*meno*' is translated, 'abide,' 'remain,' and 'continue.' **"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father."** (I Jn 2:24 KJV)

This concept, that part of the Holy Spirit's job is to teach us to 'abide' in our Lord, is critical in establishing a 'covering' of protection over our interpreting of the written and spoken Word. In another place John records the words of Jesus on the subject of 'abiding in Him':

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (Jo 15:4-5).

To abide in Jesus is to discard all confidence in self, and 'put on' or 'sink into' the same heart attitude of dependence and obedience He had to the Father. In this respect, Jesus said, **"..the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees (through the Spirit) the Father do ; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."** (Jo 5:19).

END-TERM SUMMARY: This second study (NT) builds on and confirms principles discovered in the first study (OT). God uses human vessels to transmit His Word to us. Inspiration of Scripture involves a spiritual revelation, or perception, settling into a person's spirit. The origin of this perception is God, but the language used to express it is, by necessity, influenced by the prophet. For this reason it is unwise to focus on anything else but the 'internal witness' of the Word when interpreting it. By His gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus enables us interpret the word. The process of interpretation is in reality the process of inspiration, or 'seeing' spiritual truth, in reverse. By the indwelling Holy Spirit, the spiritual nature of the 'external word' is 'seen,' and its origins discerned. It is now 'fresh revelation'--or simply dead words.