

THE BIBLE IS GOD'S FLUTE

2 Tim.3.16 continued
from #3176.6

What the Bible thinks of itself is a question logically prior to what we think of it. A member of our every-other-Tuesday-evening Bible group typed into her computer "What does the Bible say about itself?" & got this: **2 Timothy 3:16-17** (here boldface, as it alone on this list is being considered in this Thinksheet), Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 119:105, James 1:22-25, & John 1:1-2,14.

The metaphor in this Thinksheet's title is suggested by θεόπνευστος *theopneustos*, literally "God-breathing" or "God-breathed." In the Greek Bible (Septuagint/NT) it occurs only in 2Tim.3.16. But some preliminaries:

The wonder & problems of **communication**

Communication with earth: REVELATION (heaven's part, with earth's help)*

Communication with heaven: PRAYER (our part, with heaven's help)

Communication on earth:

FELLOWSHIP (with heaven's help)

WITNESS (with heaven's help)

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* While all four modes of communication were involved in producing the Bible, let's here concentrate on the first; & let's do so by translations-attention to the first assertion in **1 Timothy 3.16-17**. ("Translations-attention"? It means comparing whatever translations you have at hand without [or at least before] looking at any helps.)

1 For this exercise, here are most of the English versions/translations I checked our verse in in my library. Now, the Internet makes owning stacks of Bibles unnecessary, thank God! Suppose you were to type "2 Timothy 3.16" into Google; you'd be overwhelmed with helps (though of various quality).

While a chronological listing of English versions/translation has historical values (including trajectories of shifts), the listing here (of the versions/translations I consulted for this Thinksheet) is alphabetical:

AT (American Translation [Chicago Bible])

Amp(lified)

BB (Bishops' Bible)

Cas(sirer)

CBW(illiams)

CEV (Contemporary English Version)

CKW (Charles Kingsley Williams)

ESV (English Standard Version)

GenB (Geneva Bible)

GrB (Great B)

JB (Jerusalem Bible)

KJV (King James Version)

LB (Living Bible)

Moff(att)

Mont(gomery)

NAB (New American Bible)

NEB (New English Bible)

NIV (New International Version)

NJB (New Jerusalem Bible)

NLT (New Living Translation)

NRSV (New Revised Standard Version)

P(hillips)

R(heims)

REB (Revised English Bible)

RSV (Revised Standard Version)

RV (Revised Version)

T(yndale)

TEV (Today's English Version [Good News Bible])

TM (The Message)

W(eymouth)

Elliott
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2 As you compared versions/translations of **2Tim.3.16-17**, did any have any other word than "and" after the first clause? Not probable: I've never seen one. But wherever "and" appears, a better rendering would be "so": the first clause states **authority**, all the rest of the passage details **utility**: Scripture is "useful..." because it comes from the highest authority, God himself, God's breath (the Heb. & Gk. wds. meaning also wind/spirit/Spirit--[all reff.NRSV] in creation of the universe, "a wind from God" [Gn.1.2]; in creation of humanity, "God breathed" into Adam's nostrils "the breath of life" [Gn.2.7.]; in creation of the church, Jesus "breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" [Jn.20.22]; Ac.1.5, Jesus says "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"; Ac.2.2: "a violent wind").

Instead of "so," we might translate "and so" or "and thus" (a frequent force of the Gk. *καὶ*)--but here the Gk. wd. doesn't have to be translated, & isn't by T (1525 with sp. strange to us) "all scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable"; by GrB (1539; same except for sp. of "insp."); by R (1582 "All scripture inspired of God, is also profitable"); by RV ("Every scripture inspired of God *is* profitable" [italics: no wd. in Gk.]); by Mont ("Every Scripture, seeing that it is God-breathed, is also profitable"); by CKW ("All scripture inspired by God is profitable"); by Cas ("As for scripture, it is all divinely inspired"). Of these, all but the last leave open the possibility that not every/all scripture (lit., "writing") contains/transmits God's breath. (The Gk. means either "every" or "all"; & breathed either in [so, contains] or through [so, transmits--which here seems preferable]; & either God-breathing [a timeless process] or God-breathed [a past process].)

Reader's choice: you can be discouraged by all the possible renderings/understandings of 2Tim.3.16, or you can be encouraged to gather fruit along the various paths leading out from the text. Paraphrastic translations (e.g., Amp/Cas/CEV/LB/NLT/P/TEV/TM) try for "dynamic equivalence" (to communicate the text's mood/feelings/ideas, unburdened by the demand for verbal [word-for-word] equivalence). E.g., my paraphrase in #3175.6: "'God breathes his Spirit-breath through all Scripture' (as if through a flute; my outing of the metaphor in 2Tim.3.16)."

3 No breath, no sounds; no sounds, no words (writing & deaf-signing being exceptions); no words, no "Word of God," revelation (on which see the 1st line after this Thinksheet's 2nd ¶: God reveals "with earth's help"): "no prophecy in Scripture ever came because" the prophets "wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God" (1P.1.20-21 NLT). "With earth's help": more help than in the cases of the Qur'an & the Book of Mormon, which claim to be transcriptions of books in heaven. BALANCE: Avoid (1) language-neglect (not taking the Bible's Heb./Aram./Gk./Eng. wds. seriously enough, & (2) Bible-worship (bibliolatry, which falsely claims that the Bible is [i.e., =s, rather than transmits] the Word of God, which was infleshed in/as Jesus).

The Bible is authoritative (we can trust it), an imperfect means (to knowing/worshipping/serving God: not an end in itself--so we should use it under the criterion of its functioning as means). Calvin's way of asserting Scripture's authority: as the believer hears/reads, "the same Spirit" through whom Scripture came "speaks within" the heart (*testimonium internum*), corroborating Scripture's truth. His double "in" (in Bible/heart) parallels my "through."

4 Of the 29 versions/translations, 25 have the Latinism "in-spir." (lit., "breathing/breathed in"). Modern Eng. tries to avoid Latinisms. Amp has both "in-spir." & "God-breathed." Mont, NIV, & TM have only "God-breathed." CEV: "Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word." ESV: "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (a case of eisegesis [in-reading]: the Gk. has no "out"; & metaphorically defective: as Scripture is not God's primary residence, "in/out" is required if "out" is to be used). The interpreter's ideal is to be free IN the Bible (knowing it), WITH the Bible (using it), & FROM it (to disagree with what in it does not "drive Christ" [as Luther put it]).

5 To what does "all/every scripture [lit., "writing"] refer? At least the OT, which Timothy knew "from childhood" (vs.15; though the OT canon [limit on inclusion] was not closed till AD/CE 90). As the NT canon wasn't closed till the 4th century, 2Ti.3.16 can't be inclusive of the whole NT as we know it. The best test of any writing is its "useful"ness in truly informing/guiding Christian leaders (3.16b-17).