

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? WHY THE APOSTLES INSISTED ON A HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

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Abstract: *This article examines the classical passages on biblical inspiration, 2 Tim 3:14–17 and 2 Pet 1:19–21, and asks why the NT authors emphasized the inspiration of Scripture. It is argued that the theological payoff is not primarily that the Scriptures contain reliable information. The purpose of inspiration is ethical and religious. As the living and powerful word of God, Scripture serves the function of a judge: it condemns and acquits, it judges the sinner to death and gives new life through faith.*

Key Words: *authority of Scripture, inspiration of Scripture, inerrancy, 2 Tim 3:14–17, 2 Pet 1:19–21*

Klaus Berger and Ulrich Wilckens have both recently called biblical scholars to reconsider their approach to the Scriptures. Without dismissing scholarly inquiry or the conventional critical methods, they have criticized the prevailing historical critical method and emphasized the need to take seriously the fact God is the one who is speaking through the pages of the Bible.¹ In an attempt to respond to their call, I wish to offer some reflections on why God has chosen to speak through the Scriptures and what he intends to accomplish thereby.

My thesis may be stated with the use of a metaphor from the court of law. I contend that Scripture should be understood in the role of the judge. While I do not dispute the legitimacy of examining Scripture, its role is not primarily that of a defendant or a witness to be scrutinized and cross-examined to test its veracity. Scripture is the judge, and its role is to pass the verdict. A judge condemns and acquits. Scripture pronounces the judgment of God; the outcome is eternal life or eternal death.

To substantiate my thesis, I will show that it is supported by the classic NT passages on biblical inspiration, 2 Tim 3:14–17 and 2 Pet 1:19–21, and reflected in Heb 4:12–13, Jas 1:18, and 1 Pet 1:23.² Then I will briefly survey a few examples of quotations from the OT in the NT. These examples will illustrate how the apostles understood Scripture as exercising the judgment of God.

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¹ Klaus Berger, *Die Bibelfälscher: Wie wir um die Wahrheit betrogen werden* (Munich: Pattloch, 2013); Ulrich Wilckens, *Kritik der Bibelkritik: wie die Bibel wieder zur Heiligen Schrift werden kann* (2012; repr. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2014).

² The literature on the concept of inspiration is vast. I have found especially insightful B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

I. 2 TIMOTHY 3:14–17

Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy partly in order to encourage him to be faithful to the gospel as he was faced with his own suffering as well as the false teaching and unethical behavior of his opponents (1:8; 4:3–4).³ Timothy was encouraged to remain steadfast in the teaching that he had received. In this context, the passage that is relevant for our present purposes, 2 Tim 3:14–17, highlights the value of Holy Scripture. This passage may be translated as follows:

Remain in the things that you have learned and that you have been convinced of, since you know from whom you have learned it, and that from infancy you have known the sacred writings, which have the power to give you wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for discipline by means of righteousness, so that God's person may be competent, fully equipped for every good work.⁴

Verse 15 refers to “the sacred writings,” which most likely correspond broadly to the collection that Christians refer to as the OT.⁵ Paul describes these writings with the participle *δυνάμενα*, which implies that the Scriptures have an innate capacity or power. This capacity of Scripture contrasts with the powerlessness of

³ Michael Prior, *Paul the Letter-Writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* (JSNTSup 23; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 62; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 566; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the NT: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 431; David J. Downs, “Faith(fulness) in Christ Jesus in 2 Timothy 3:15,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 148.

Although my argument does not depend upon this point, I assume Pauline authorship. See Bo Reicke, “Chronologie der Pastoralbriefe,” *TLZ* 101 (1976): 82–94; Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (2nd ed.; NIBCNT; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 1–31; Prior, *Paul the Letter-Writer*, 37–90; Donald Guthrie, *NT Introduction* (4th ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 607–49; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 4–52; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Word, 2000), xlvi–cxxxv; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 55–99; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the NT* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 554–68; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 3–88. James Miller thinks the letters to Timothy and Titus contain an authentic core of notes that were originally from the apostle Paul (*The Pastoral Letters as Composite Documents* [SNTSMS 93; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 145; similarly, I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999], 88–89).

⁴ For *γραφή* as denoting Scripture as a whole, not an individual passage of Scripture, see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 566–67; Quinn and Wacker, *First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 760; and especially Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 445; contra Lorenz Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, vol. 2: *Kommentar zum zweiten Timotheusbrief* (HTKNT 11/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 147; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 791–92; Alfons Weiser, *Der zweite Brief an Timotheus* (EKK 16/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 280; Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 586–87. Quinn and Wacker are uncommitted (*First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 760).

⁵ Some scholars argue that *γραφή* in v. 16 may refer not only to the Scriptures of Israel but also to the Jesus tradition and maybe even some of Paul's letters (Ceslas Spicq, *Saint Paul: Les épîtres pastorales*, vol. 2 (4th ed.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 787–88; Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 568). Although Jesus's words and Paul's letters had the same authority as Scripture, it cannot be demonstrated that Paul intends such a reference in 2 Tim 3:16. His reminder concerning Timothy's infancy (v. 15) speaks against it.

human beings, who cannot (*δυνάμεθα*) take anything out of this world (1 Tim 6:7), who are unable (*δύναται*) to see God (1 Tim 6:16), and who can (*δυνάμενα*) never arrive at a knowledge of truth (2 Tim 3:7), as they have denied the power (*δύναμιν*) of godliness (3:5). The Scriptures, however, have a power that leads to salvation.⁶

They lead to salvation by making people wise. The verb *σοφίζω* means “to make wise” or “to instruct.” In the LXX, this verb is often used in Psalms, where it describes the wisdom that comes from the Lord. However, the closest parallel to 2 Tim 3:15 is found in Prov 16:17, a verse which may very well be the direct background for Paul’s argument in these verses in 2 Timothy. The Septuagint version of the verse may be translated: “the paths of life turn away from evil, and the ways of righteousness (*δικαιοσύνης*) are length of existence. He who receives discipline (*παιδείαν*) will prosper (*ἐν ἀγαθοῖς ἔσται*), and he who heeds rebukes (*ἐλέγχους*) will become wise (*σοφισθήσεται*). He who heeds his ways preserves his own soul, and he who loves his life will spare his mouth.” In addition to the term *σοφίζω*, Prov 16:17 also includes the terms *δικαιοσύνη* (“righteousness”), *παιδεία* (“discipline”), *ἀγαθός* (“good”), and *ἔλεγχος* (“rebuke”). The first three of these terms also occur in 2 Tim 3:15–17, and *ἐλεγμός* (“reproof”), which is a cognate of *ἔλεγχος*, is also found in verse 16.⁷

This section of the book of Proverbs emphasizes the benefit of seeking the Lord in humility (16:2, 5, 18, 19 LXX) and righteousness (16:7, 8 LXX). Verse 17 LXX highlights the need to receive discipline, which is the way to humility (cf. Prov 15:32–33 MT). The point is that the way to wisdom goes through being disciplined by the Lord. This discipline is corrective, so that those who are trained may be rebuked. The term that is used for “rebuke” (*ἔλεγχος*) is a forensic term that refers to providing proof, and, more specifically, to accuse and charge someone with wrongdoing. Those who are trained in wisdom need to be condemned of their own sin so that they can see the error of their own ways. Paul uses the language of the proverb, and makes a similar point: the wisdom that leads to salvation comes through the discipline of the Lord and through being convicted of sin.

⁶ Similarly, Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 443; Quinn and Wacker, *First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 759; Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 583. Quinn and Wacker note the parallel in Josephus, *Ant.* 20.264: “they give credit for wisdom to those alone who have an exact knowledge of the law and who are capable (*δυναμένοις*) of interpreting the meaning (*δύναμιν*) of the Holy Scriptures.”

⁷ The most important parallels between 2 Tim 3:15–17 and Prov 16:17 are not found in the MT, only in the LXX. Crawford H. Toy viewed the LXX version as an addition made by the translator (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* [ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899], 328). However, recent text-critical research has provided evidence that the LXX of Proverbs was based on a different Hebrew *Vorlage* (Emanuel Tov, “Recensional Differences Between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Proverbs,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* [ed. Emanuel Tov; VTSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 424–31; followed by Michael V. Fox, “Editing Proverbs: The Challenge of the Oxford Hebrew Bible,” *JNSL* 32 [2006]: 4). In any case, the ideas expressed in the LXX addition are also attested in the MT (Prov 1:7–8; 3:11–12; 5:12–14; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18).

As Paul affirms the salvific value of the Scriptures, he also emphasizes that these Scriptures have their value in light of Christ and must be understood on the basis of the faith that is directed toward him.⁸

Verse 16 contains the famous term *θεόπνευστος*, which is unattested in literature predating Paul, and may very well have been coined by him.⁹ It is usually translated “inspired by God,” but a more literal translation might be “God-breathed,” as in the NIV. The point is that the words of Scripture come from God himself, and the image is of the breath that comes from God’s mouth, an image rich in connotations in the Bible. It is the life-giving breath that he breathed into Adam when he made him a living being (Gen 2:7; cf. Eccl 12:7).¹⁰

As the life-giving word of God, Scripture is useful for teaching. This term is then unpacked in three more specific terms: “reproof,” “correction,” and “discipline.”¹¹ The first of these, the noun *ἐλεγμός* (“reproof”) is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. It is derived from the verb *ἐλέγχω*, which in Homeric Greek meant “to put to shame.” In classical Greek, it is commonly used in forensic contexts and refers to cross-examination, and more specifically, it may mean “to disprove” or “refute” (LSJ). The Septuagint primarily employs the verb to translate the Hebrew verb *יָכַח*. Its use belongs in the context of God’s judgment, and denotes God’s discipline of human beings as he punishes them by word (Ps 49:8, 21; Job 13:10 LXX) and deed (Gen 31:42; 2 Kgdms 7:14; 1 Chr 16:21; Ps 6:2; 104:14; Prov 3:11; Job 5:17; Hab 1:12; Isa 2:4 LXX).¹²

The next term, *ἐπανόρθωσις* (“correction”) is also a *hapax*. This metaphor is of construction and rebuilding. It is used to mean improvement and correction.

Most translations render the last noun, *παιδεία*, as “training,” but this translation is misleading. In secular Greek, the term often denotes training, teaching, and education (LSJ), but it frequently takes on a more specific nuance in biblical usage. Proverbs 3:11–12 is a telling example: “My son, do not belittle the Lord’s discipline (*παιδείας*) nor break down when you are reproved (*ἐλεγχόμενος*) by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines (*παιδεύει*) and he punishes (*μαστιγοῖ*) every son he accepts” (NETS). The noun *παιδεία* and the verb *παιδεύω* are here used to translate the Hebrew words *מָוֶסֶר* and *יָכַח*, which describe the Lord’s discipline. In the

⁸ The vast majority of commentators understand the genitive *πίστις Χριστοῦ* as an objective genitive in this verse, but there are a few dissenting voices (Johnson, *Timothy*, 420). The reference to Timothy’s faith in verse 14 makes an objective genitive the most likely. David Downs concedes this point, while he opts for understanding the genitive as ambiguous (“Faith[fulness] in Christ Jesus,” 160).

⁹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 794.

¹⁰ James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 2. John Walton and Brent Sandy suggest that the term may evoke the power of Scripture (*The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013], 270).

¹¹ This purpose clause (introduced by the preposition *πρός*) describes the aim of Scripture. It is unwarranted to take it as a statement regarding the areas concerning which Scripture is reliable, even though the argument is frequently made (e.g. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999], 94). The question of the intention of a writing and that of the extent of its trustworthiness are two distinct questions. This verse addresses the former, not the latter.

¹² Friedrich Büchsel, “ἐλέγχω κτλ.,” *TDNT* 2:473.

Septuagint version, the parallelism between *παιδεύει* (“disciplines”) and *μαστιγοῖ* (“punishes”) shows that the reference is to a form of discipline that is experienced as painful. The education that is in view is the education that comes from experiencing the punitive discipline of the Lord. This discipline is beneficial because it is meted out by God, who acts as a loving father.

In Deuteronomy 8, God’s way of dealing with the wilderness generation is mentioned as another example of his discipline. In verse 2, the Septuagint goes so far as to say that “the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness so that he might distress (*κακώσῃ*) you and test you and discern the things in your heart” (NETS). The verb *κακώω* is used, a word that means “to cause harm to” (BDAG). In verse 5, this doing harm is explained as God’s discipline: “And you shall know in your heart that as a certain person might discipline his son, so the Lord your God will discipline (*παιδεύσει*) you” (NETS).¹³

While there are some examples of a more neutral use of the words of the *παιδευ*-root in the NT (Acts 7:22; 22:3), the more specific biblical usage is prevalent. Hebrews 12:7–11 is illustrative; God’s discipline is understood to be painful while it lasts, but as later yielding “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11).

In the letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul uses this terminology in a similar way.¹⁴ As he calls Timothy and Titus to do the corrective work of reproving false teaching, he employs the language of *παιδεία*. Paul informs Timothy that he has turned Hymenaeus and Alexander over “to Satan, so that they may learn (*παιδευθήσιν*) not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:20). As the Lord’s servant, Timothy must be correcting (*παιδεύοντα*) opponents with gentleness, so that God may give them the gift of a changed mind to know the truth (2 Tim 2:25). Paul reminds Titus that God’s grace is “training (*παιδευούσα*) us to renounce impiety and worldly passions” (Titus 2:12).¹⁵

This discipline is qualified as being “in righteousness.” This prepositional clause should not be read as designating the goal of the training, as most translations construe it. Rather, as is so common in NT Greek, the preposition *ἐν* is used for the simple dative, and in this case the dative should probably be understood as a dative of cause or a dative of means. As in Proverbs, God’s discipline is beneficial because it is meted out by our loving, heavenly Father, who never acts capriciously, but always in accordance with his righteous character.

¹³ For other examples, see Deut 11:2; 2 Kgdms 7:14–15; Ps 117:18; 2 Macc 6:15; *Pss. Sol.* 3:4; 13:9. Cf. Georg Bertram, “*παιδεύω κτλ.*,” in *TDNT* 5:608–12; Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (8th ed.; KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 439.

¹⁴ Recent scholarship has justly questioned the validity of treating 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus as a distinct body of literature (Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 88–89). However, if these letters were written by Paul towards the end of his life, his use of terminology is likely to be similar in all these letters.

¹⁵ Quinn and Wacker correctly note that the Pauline use of this terminology “connotes the effects of severe illness and life-threatening trials (1 Cor 11:32; 2 Cor 6:9)” (*First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 751). Luke Timothy Johnson maintains that the meaning of *παιδεία* in 2 Tim 3:16 is “‘education’ or even ‘culture,’” but he bases this conclusion on the use of the word in Greek philosophical writers, not on its use in the Bible or in the context in 2 Timothy (*Timothy*, 421).

The three terms “reproof,” “correction,” and “discipline” all refer to the corrective function of Scripture. Scripture is useful in that it leads to salvation, and this salvific task is inextricably tied to Scripture’s role as judge. Scripture demonstrates the errors of human beings and corrects them. It allows people to experience God’s punitive discipline.¹⁶

Through experiencing this discipline, the person of God becomes “competent, fully equipped for every good work” (v. 17). These good works are likely meant in the broadest sense (not as the work of reproving the false teachers), but this competency is seen as the fundamental bulwark against the errors of the opponents, whose doctrinal errors were only matched by the errors of their unethical lifestyle, and whose influence spread like gangrene (2:17).¹⁷ As always, Paul presupposes that sound teaching is reflected in a life of obedience to God.¹⁸

Second Timothy 3:16 has often been compared to Rom 15:4, but it should also be compared to Rom 3:19–20: “we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” Another important parallel is Gal 3:22: “the Scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” In addition to 2 Tim 3:16, Gal 3:22 is an example of the term “Scripture” possibly being used with a broader reference than to an individual passage. It may refer to Scripture as a whole, and it makes a similar point as 2 Tim 3:16: Scripture dismantles the errors of human beings and places them under the judgment of God.

Second Timothy 3:16 makes explicit what is implicit in these parallel passages: the judging and punitive work of God’s word is in the service of salvation. The way to salvation and a new lifestyle goes through the painful, corrective discipline that God effects through his word, when he convicts people of their sin.

II. 2 PETER 1:19–21

The positive, salvific purpose of God’s word is highlighted in the second classic passage concerning the inspiration of Scripture, 2 Pet 1:19–21. As Peter’s last will and testament, 2 Peter also addresses the threat of false teachers.¹⁹ These

¹⁶ Mounce concedes that Paul does not refer to the truthfulness of the Scriptures as he is making this argument. Nevertheless, Mounce maintains that “although never stated, the assumption is that because Scripture comes from God, it is therefore true, and because it is true, it is therefore profitable” (*Pastoral Epistles*, 566). This is a misconstrual of Paul’s argument. The truthfulness of Scripture is not the point that Paul is impressing on Timothy; his point is the effectiveness of Scripture in bringing ethical and religious transformation.

¹⁷ Similarly, Spicq, *Les épîtres pastorales*, 790; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 796.

¹⁸ Frances Young observes that “the assumption [that] underlies the whole of these letters [is] that theology and ethics are inseparable” (*The Theology of the Pastoral Letters* [NT Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 27–28).

¹⁹ Although not crucial to the argument, I assume Petrine authorship of 2 Peter. See Guthrie, *Introduction*, 811–42; J. Daryl Charles, *Virtue Amidst Vice: The Catalog of Virtues in 2 Peter 1* (JSNTSup 150;

teachers apparently did not believe in the return of Christ as judge and consequently indulged in a licentious lifestyle (3:3–4).

Peter responds by explaining that Christ gives his followers an entirely new life; he even makes them “participants of the divine nature” (1:4). Peter also goes to some length to clarify that the message that he had proclaimed about Christ was reliable and trustworthy, and he recalls the time when he heard the very voice of the heavenly Father, as he testified concerning his Son on the mountain of transfiguration (2 Pet 1:16–18).

In 2 Pet 1:19–21, Peter then refers to the prophetic word of Scripture, which he compares to the voice from heaven:

And as something even firmer, we have the prophetic word, which you do well to pay attention to as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing first of all that no prophecy of Scripture stems from the prophet’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever carried forth by a human’s will, but the humans spoke from God as they were carried by the Holy Spirit.

Because he is concerned with their function as a witness to the “power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:16), Peter refers to the Scriptures as “the prophetic word,” a usage that is found in Philo as well.²⁰ The most straightforward way to understand the grammar of this passage is that Peter compares the prophetic word to the heavenly voice, and claims that the prophetic word is even firmer than the words that were spoken from heaven.²¹ Most commentators and translators balk at this conclusion, however, and opt for the meaning that the heavenly voice has made the prophetic word even more firm.²² A minority of interpreters suggest that the comparative is used as a superlative, and that no comparison is intended: the prophetic word is most certain.²³

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 11–43; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC 37; Nashville: B&H, 2003), 255–76; Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 659–63; Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 139–50; Curtis P. Giese, *2 Peter and Jude* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia, 2012), 6–11.

²⁰ Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres de Saint Pierre* (SB; Paris: Gabalda, 1966), 223; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (BNTC; London: Black, 1969), 321; contra Jerome Neyrey, who thinks the reference is to NT prophecy (“The Apologetic Use of the Transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16–21,” *CBQ* 42 [1980]: 515–18).

²¹ Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clak, 1901), 268.

²² Hans Windisch, *Die katholischen Briefe* (2nd ed.; HNT 15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1930), 90; Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe—Der Judasbrief* (2nd ed.; HTKNT 13/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 200; Spicq, *Les Épîtres de Saint Pierre*, 223; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 321; Henning Paulsen, *Der Zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief* (KEK 12/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 120; Anton Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief, der 2. Petrusbrief* (EKK 22; Zurich: Benziger, 1994), 170; Donald P. Senior and Daniel J. Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter* (SP 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 257; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 207.

²³ Neyrey, “Transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16–21,” 515; Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (WBC 50; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 223; Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 226; Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 90.

In any case, the point for our present purposes is that the words of Scripture are firm and reliable. The contrast is with the “cleverly devised myths” of verse 16. As Richard Bauckham has demonstrated, the point of the passage is to establish the divine origin of the prophetic words. The common interpretation, reflected in many translations, that prophecy should not be subject to an individual’s interpretation, does justice neither to the literary nor the historical context. Rather, the point is that no prophecy originated as the result of human interpretation. Peter makes a statement concerning the origin, not the interpretation of prophecy. He rejects the idea that the words of the prophets constitute their own interpretation of God’s works. Instead, they spoke what they spoke as God gave them to speak through the Holy Spirit.²⁴

The effect of these firm and God-given words of scriptural prophecy is to be “a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” This morning star recalls the messianic prophecy of Balaam in Num 24:7 (cf. *T. Levi* 18:3; *T. Jud.* 24:1–5; 1QM 11:6–7), predicting a star coming out of Jacob and a scepter rising out of Israel. But what time does Peter have in mind when he describes the rising of the star “in your hearts,” coinciding with the dawning of the day? The majority interpretation holds that the day in question is the day of the Lord, the day of the parousia. Accordingly, the rising of the morning star has been taken as the illumination that comes with the presence of the Lord in the consummation.²⁵

The problem with this interpretation is that it is not easily able to account for the phrase “in your hearts.” Christ’s parousia does not take place in the hearts of believers. Bauckham insists that the verse describes the full revelation of Christ, which takes place at the parousia, and that “the only point being made is that prophecy, as a partial revelation pointing forward to the full eschatological revelation, will become superfluous when the full revelation arrives.”²⁶ True, in the immediate context, Peter reminds his audience of the trustworthiness of his proclamation, the content of which he describes as “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 16). But is all he has to say that the future revelation of Christ will overshadow the current revelation? In the broader context, he states a more comprehensive purpose of proclaiming Christ’s power: “His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his

²⁴ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 229–33; similarly Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 95–96; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 322–23; Duane F. Watson, “The Second Letter of Peter,” *NIB* 12:343; Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 210–13; contra Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe—Der Judasbrief*, 201; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 323–24; Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 181–82; Senior and Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 257.

²⁵ Bigg, *Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 269; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 322–23; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 225–26; Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 183–84; Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief, der 2. Petrusbrief*, 171; Senior and Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 257; Davids, *Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 209–10; Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 228–29; Giese, *2 Peter and Jude*, 91–92.

²⁶ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 226; similarly Paulsen, *Der Zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief*, 121–22; Vögtle, *Der Judasbrief, der 2. Petrusbrief*, 170–71.

precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature” (1:3–4).

While the bulk of 2 Peter is concerned with refuting the false teachers that are skeptical about the parousia (3:3–4), the letter’s introduction and conclusion show that the refutation of these heretics serves a broader purpose: the health of the recipients’ faith and their continuing ethical purity (1:3–8; 3:14, 17–18).²⁷ The false teaching represents not merely a threat of a cognitive nature; its errors manifest themselves in a sinful lifestyle (2:2–3, 10, 12–14, 17–19). The influence of the false teachers has disastrous results in the lives of those who are led astray by them as well (2:18–22).

It is therefore unwarranted to read 2 Pet 1:16–21 as addressing only the question of whether the parousia will really happen. The reality of the parousia is important because it means that all sinners will receive the judgment they deserve, a point that Peter hammers home in the section that extends from 2:1–3:13. “The present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless” (2 Pet 3:7). Knowing that Christ will judge the world, the believers are urged to “strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation” (2 Pet 3:14–15). The certainty of the parousia is important because it has ethical implications.

When Peter teaches his audience to pay attention to the prophetic word, “as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19), it is therefore more natural to see it as a reference to a personal experience.²⁸ In the NT, the “heart” (*καρδία*) consistently denotes the inner life of a person. Second Peter 2:14 describes “hearts trained in greed.” In his first letter, Peter urges believers to “love one another deeply from the heart” (1:22); he calls on the wives to let their adornment be “their hidden person, namely the heart, with the perennial beauty of a meek and gentle spirit” (3:4); and he admonishes all to “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” (3:15). This final admonishment is the imperatival counterpart to the description in 2 Pet 1:19. The firmness of the prophetic word makes it possible for the believers to sanctify Christ as Lord in their hearts. The prophetic word is so closely associated with the presence of the Lord himself that faithful reception of the word is at the same time acceptance of the Lord. When they pay attention to the prophetic word, they accept the Lord himself into their hearts. His presence is a salvific presence, so that the dark place, which is the human heart, is transformed into light, when Christ himself, as the morning star, rises in it.

²⁷ Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 113; Senior and Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 230.

²⁸ Similarly, Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe—Der Judasbrief*, 200–10. Spicq also notes the parallels in the works of Philo, who maintains that the laws of God are “as stars illuminating their souls” (*Decal.* 49), and who describes the formation of virtue as a “dawning ‘rising’ in the soul” (*κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀνατολῆς; Conf.* 60; cf. *Ebr.* 44). See Spicq, *Les Épitres de Saint Pierre*, 224.

The theology that underlies Peter's language corresponds to the conviction of James, who affirms that "the implanted word has the power to save your souls" (Jas 1:21). The picture is that of the word as a living entity, a seed, that is working its power in those who receive it.

The apostle Paul, whose writings Second Peter recommends (3:15–16), also employs the metaphor of light and darkness to portray the personal transformation of the believer. "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

Peter's affirmation regarding the prophetic word complements Paul's reminder to Timothy. The Scriptures have an inherent transformational power. They provide correction and discipline, so that the person of God may be wise unto salvation and equipped for every good work. It is the Lord himself who is working through his word, to keep the believers from error and to ensure their complete transformation, as darkness is changed into light when Christ is exerting his influence on his followers.

III. HEBREWS 4:12–13; JAMES 1:18; 1 PETER 1:23

What 2 Tim 3:14–17 and 2 Pet 1:19–21 have to say about Scripture corresponds to what is said about the word of God in Heb 4:12–13. The author complements his promise of a future rest with a warning about God's judgment: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account." This judgment, which is described as future in verse 13, is projected into the present in verse 12, and the active agent in this judgment is the word of God. God's word has the same attributes as God himself. As God is living (ζῶν; 3:12), so is his word living and active (ζῶν ... καὶ ἐνεργής).²⁹ The function of the word is not limited to disclosing what is inside a human being; it also passes judgment on a person's internal life; "it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."³⁰

²⁹ Similarly, Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 280–81.

³⁰ Gene Smillie concedes that "the role of the Word of God here is judiciary," but insists that the overall purpose is positive, not negative. He therefore suggests that the metaphor is that of a surgeon, whose incision, albeit painful, is curative. More specifically, he sees the metaphor against the biblical background of the circumcision of the heart, and maintains that the metaphor concerns the healing of the hardened heart ("Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ" in Hebrews 4:12–13," *NovT* 46 [2004]: 357). I agree that the purpose of Hebrews is to ensure the continued faithfulness of the audience, and that the reference to judgment in this passage must be understood in that light, not as an isolated word concerning judgment. I am not convinced, however, that the author intended to invoke the surgeon's knife, rather than the sword, even though it might be a possible translation of *μαχαίρα*. There is no reference to healing in these verses. To the contrary, the work of the *μαχαίρα* is to be judge (4:12). The term is known from the LXX as a metaphor for destructive judgment (Isa 49:2; cf. also Rev 19:15, 21), but not for healing. However, that the image is of judgment, rather than surgery, does not mean that it is an ultimately nega-

The life-giving power of God's word is also clearly expressed by James, who reminds his audience that "in fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (1:18). A few verses later, he exhorts: "Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls" (1:21). Peter also makes a similar point: "you have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23; cf. 1 Thess 2:13).

IV. OT QUOTATIONS IN THE NT

The apostles' convictions regarding the Scripture's role as judge have very practical implications. Perhaps the clearest example is found in Romans 3. In quick succession, Paul quotes a number of Scriptural passages, mostly from the Psalms (Ps 14:1–3 in vv. 10–13; Ps 5:10 and 140:4 in v. 13; Ps 10:7 in v. 14; Ps 36:2 in v. 18). Modern scholars agree that these Scripture passages in their original contexts do not refer to people in general, but to the wicked within the community of Israel or to their enemies.³¹ Nevertheless, Paul applies the indictments to all people, Jews and Gentiles, without discrimination. He concludes with a word about the function of the law: "whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God" (Rom 3:19). The Scriptures that Paul has quoted, classified as "the law" in Paul's conclusion, are living and active in the sense that they condemn all human beings and hold them accountable to God. God's judgment is effected through his word in the Scriptures.

As Paul deconstructs the Corinthians' worldly understanding of Christian ministry in 1 Corinthians 1–4, he employs a similar strategy. He uses the Scriptures to condemn the self-proclaimed wisdom of the Corinthians. In 1 Cor 1:19, he quotes from Isa 29:14: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart," and in 3:19–20 he quotes from Job 5:13 and Ps 94:11: "he catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

Paul also finds that the condemnation of the false teachers in Galatia has been pronounced in the Scriptures hundreds of years before the fact. With a quotation from Gen 21:10 and with reference to his opponents, Paul expresses the verdict: "drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman" (Gal 4:30).

Paul is often contrasted with the apostle James, but when it comes to their convictions regarding Scripture, it is impossible to tell them apart. James observes

tive image. God's judgment serves a constructive purpose. Exposure and condemnation of sin effect repentance and ultimately salvation.

³¹ Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, vol. 1 (EKK 6/1; Zurich: Benziger, 1978), 173; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988), 150; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 205.

that his audience, who treats people differently based on their social status, stands condemned. The verdict is passed by Scripture. James quotes the love commandment from Lev 19:18 and concludes: "But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jas 2:9).

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews also finds that the judgment in Scripture is applicable to his audience, but he leaves it open as to whether it actually will befall them. He quotes from Ps 95:7–11, which ends on a note of harsh judgment: "in my anger I swore, 'They will not enter my rest'" (Heb 3:11).

However, the words of Scripture do not only have a destructive function. They also offer words of comfort and reassurance. Seemingly without regard for who the original addressees may have been, the apostles apply the words of Scripture to establish the identity of their own audiences. The apostle Peter, for example, presupposes that his Gentile Christian audience has undergone an identity transformation. They are no longer Gentiles, as Peter distinguishes between the Gentiles and the recipients of the letter (1 Pet 2:12). Peter's audience is instead addressed as if they were diaspora Jews (1 Pet 1:1). Their identity has been established by Hosea's prophecy, a prophecy that originally concerned the ten northern tribes of Israel, but that Peter audaciously addresses to the Gentile Christians: "once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:10). The words of Scripture assure the Gentiles that they now are what they previously were not: the people of God.

In a similar fashion, Paul is convinced that the blessing of Abraham that is found in Scripture continues to pronounce a blessing today, a blessing that applies to Gentile Christ-believers: "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.' For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed" (Gal 3:8–9; cf. Rom 4:9–12).

V. CONCLUSION

The apostles were convinced of the trustworthiness and instructive value of Scripture, but these adjectives do not get to the heart of the matter. It would not be incorrect to say that instruction in Scripture provides new information, but such a statement is of limited value in explaining the divine purpose of inspiration. Analogously, one might affirm that eating gives knowledge of the difference in taste between sugar and salt. It is true, but it is not a particularly apt description of the function and purpose of eating. To be instructed by Scripture is to be in the hands of the living God, the God who "kills and brings to life; [who] brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6).

The apostles' views on ethical formation are therefore quite different from the prevalent views of Greco-Roman ethical philosophy, which was based on the assumption that right knowledge leads to right action. The apostles knew that a more radical approach was necessary. To apply the words of the prophet Jeremiah, only the power of God can change the skin of an Ethiopian or the spots of a leopard. Only the life-giving power of God can ensure that people can do good when

they are accustomed to doing evil (Jer 13:23). Ethical transformation cannot be accomplished merely through correct instruction; it is a matter of new creation.

To read the Scriptures is therefore not primarily to be enrolled in school or to have discovered a more reliable alternative to Wikipedia. It is to stand face-to-face with God. It is to be summoned by the judge of the universe and to be confronted with the powers of the new creation.

When Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell everything he owned, give it to the poor, and follow him, the words of Jesus served as the judge that condemned the young man (Mark 10:17–31). But modern Bible scholars (and I do not wish to exempt myself from this charge) treat Jesus's words as a witness to be cross-examined and inquire why Jesus did not make the same requests of everyone.

A theology that takes seriously the fact that Scripture is the inspired word of God needs to honor the judge and acknowledge that the Bible offers more than propositions that require consent.³² The Bible not only describes, but it discloses, disciplines, condemns, and judges human sin. It not only explains the nature of salvation, but it grants salvation as a free gift. It not only paints a picture of a new life, but it creates new life. It is “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for discipline.” It is “a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

³² Kevin Vanhoozer argues that “Scripture is neither simply the recital of the acts of God nor merely a book of inert propositions. Scripture is rather composed of divine-human speech acts that, through what they say, accomplish several authoritative cognitive, spiritual and social functions” (*First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002], 131). David Dockery suggests that “the term inerrancy may not go far enough” and continues, “Living with a Holy Spirit-prompted desire to respond to the message and authority of the Bible brings reproof and correction (see 2 Tim. 3:16), which results in contrition, discipleship, and enablement for worship and service (see 2 Tim. 3:17)” (*Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority, and Interpretation* [Nashville: B&H, 1995], 67, 72). I would only wish to clarify that the Scripture is the agent that brings reproof and correction.