

## As When the Prophet Moses Raised

*Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

As when the prophet Moses raised  
the brazen serpent high,  
the wounded looked and straight were cured,  
the people ceased to die:

So from the Savior on the cross  
a healing virtue flows;  
who looks to him with lively faith  
is saved from endless woes.

For God gave up his Son to death,  
so gen'rous was his love,  
that all the faithful might enjoy  
eternal life above.

Not to condemn the sons of men  
the Son of God appeared;  
no weapons in his hand are seen,  
nor voice of terror heard:

He came to raise our fallen state,  
and our lost hopes restore;  
faith leads us to the mercy seat,  
and bids us fear no more.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### Disclaimers to Inspiration?

*Kevin T. Bauder*

The Bible affirms its own inspiration. Both testaments have the authority of Christ behind them. The New Testament authors treat their own writings as authoritative. They even cite one another's writings as Scripture. Their affirmations about the text imply verbal inspiration, which in turn entails the inerrancy of Scripture as originally inspired.

Nevertheless, critics cite a handful of passages from the New Testament as evidence that at least some passages must not be inspired. Read in a certain way, these passages appear to disclaim inspiration. In them, the biblical writer seems to be insisting that his words are merely his and not divinely chosen.

Read correctly, however, these passages do not disavow inspiration. Instead, they serve to bolster the claims that the writers speak with divine authority. Three of the most commonly cited passages occur in the writings of Paul.

The first of these is in Romans 3:5 where, in the middle of his argument, Paul interjects the parenthetical statement, "I speak as a man." Taken in isolation, the statement seems puzzling. Is Paul suggesting that during this particular discussion he is merely offering his own human perspective rather than speaking as the oracles of God?

As so often occurs, the answer becomes clear by paying attention to the context. The epistle to the Romans is a tightly reasoned theological treatise. In advancing the argument of this epistle, Paul anticipates that he will have to deal with objections that will occur to his readers. His strategy is to raise the objections himself, usually as if they were posed by some imaginary interlocutor.

For example, near the end of Romans 3 Paul says that God justifies Jews as well as Gentiles through faith (3:30). That observation raises a possible objection, and Paul frames the objection as a question in the next verse: "Do we then make void the law through faith?" Paul then answers his own question by exclaiming, "God forbid" (3:31). He then gives the reasons that this objection is mistaken. Paul has raised the objection simply so that he can refute it.



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu  
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Similarly, in Romans 6:1 he asks, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” In 6:15 he follows up by asking, “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?” Paul’s answer to both questions is, “God forbid.” Clearly, he is not endorsing the objection. Instead, he raises it so that he can dispatch it.

Another instance occurs in the opening verses of Romans 7, where Paul argues that God’s law works through human depravity so as to provoke sin and bring death. This teaching might leave the impression that the law itself is a bad thing. Paul anticipates this objection and raises it himself: “What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?*” (7:7). Again his answer is, “God forbid.”

In each case, Paul not only states these objections and denounces them as wrong but also goes on to show why they are wrong. He shows where the reasoning of these questions breaks down. By the time readers reach Romans 7, they should have become accustomed to this pattern, and Paul continues to employ it through the rest of his argument (see 9:14, 19; 11:1).

Paul first deploys this strategy early in Romans 3. There he asks a cluster of rhetorical questions that constitute objections to his argument. The first is, “For what if some [Jews] did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” (Rom 3:2). He answers this question with the phrase that becomes his standard reply: “God forbid.”

His answer to that objection, however, raises a more serious objection. “But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?*” (3:5). As in other instances, Paul does not think this is a good question, and he does not think that it advances a sound argument. In this case, however, Paul wishes to distance himself from the objection even more than usual. He wants people to understand that he is not endorsing it. So he inserts the parenthetical qualification, “I speak as a man.”

What Paul is saying is that this is the kind of argument that sinful humans are likely to cook up. He is imagining some guy who doesn’t want to believe the truth and who tosses this argument into the debate to confuse the issue. When Paul says, “I speak as a man,” he is saying, “This is exactly the kind of argument that *that* guy would make.” Paul then rejects the argument with his standard denunciation: “God forbid,” going on to expose its flaws.

In other words, Paul does not intend to make any statement at all about his authority or the inspiration of what he writes. Instead, he intends to put a bad argument, framed as a question, in context. Paul is saying that this isn’t his argument, but the kind of argument that an unbeliever would make. As in the other instances, Paul raises the question only to be able to answer it and to refute the bad thinking that it embodies.

In no sense does Paul disclaim divine authority for his teaching or divine inspiration for his writing. The text stands as a model of persuasion, with Paul dismantling every objection that sinful humans throw against his argument. As an objection to verbal inspiration, Romans 3:5 simply fails.



---

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---