

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SPIRIT: READING ΑΠΟ ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣ IN ITS CONTEXT (2 CORINTHIANS 3:18)*

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Zusammenfassung: Es gibt verschiedene Interpretationen von ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος (2 Kor 3:18). Die Syntax erlaubt mehrere Möglichkeiten, sie zu übersetzen: (1) *vom Herrn des Geistes*, (2) *vom Geist des Herrn*, (3) *vom Herrn, dem Geist*, (4) *vom dem Herrn, der der Geist ist*, (5) *vom Herrn, der Geist ist*, (6) *aus dem Geist, der der Herr ist*, (7) *aus dem Geist, der Herr ist*, (8) *aus dem Geist, der vom Herrn ist*. Angesichts dieser semantischen Fülle wird deutlich, dass der Kontext berücksichtigt werden muss, um zu einer zufriedenstellenden Bedeutung zu gelangen. Hierzu werden mehrere Schritte unternommen. Zuerst wird die Bedeutung der Begriffe πνεῦμα und κύριος in 2 Korinther 3 untersucht. Zweitens werden ähnliche Konstruktionen analysiert. Drittens wird die Rolle des Ausdrucks in der Argumentation des Paulus in 2 Korinther 3 untersucht. Der Zweck dieser drei Schritte ist eine Übersetzung zu finden, die dem Kontext am besten entspricht. Das Papier argumentiert, dass die Bedeutung von ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος *aus dem Geist, der der Herr ist* ist.

Schlüsselwörter: Geist, Herr, 2 Kor 3:18, Bedeutung, Kontext, Syntax.

1. Introduction

Regarding the expression ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος (2Cor 3:18), A. T. Robertson (1919, p. 503) stated almost 100 years ago that “it is not clear whether κυρίου is genitive or is the ablative in apposition with πνεύματος?”. As such, Robertson understood the expression to mean “from the Spirit of the Lord” or “from the Spirit [which is] from the Lord”. Blass/ Debrunner/ Funk agree with Robertson, considering κυρίου an attributive genitive¹. This goes against the established rule

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¹ “Any case of an anarthrous noun which depends on a preposition is usually placed before a case governed by it, but not always. Even the rule that an anarthrous gen. dependent on a preposition, if it governs another gen., must stand first (to avoid misunderstanding) is not without exception” (Blass/ Debrunner/ Funk 1961, p. 249). The reference is to Buttmann’s rule, that when “the nouns have no article, it is a fixed rule that the preposition can never be separated by the limiting Genitive from its substantive, when this substantive (governed by the prep.) itself stands in the Genitive, even though the

that when two genitives are joined together, the first in order will govern the second. This would imply the translation “from the Lord of the Spirit”². Notwithstanding the rule, Turner considers 2 Corinthians 3:18 an exception, translating κυρίου πνεύματος with “the Spirit of the Lord” (Moulton/ Turner 1998, p. 218). In addition to these options, others prefer to take πνεύματος appositionally; hence the translation “from the Lord who is the Spirit”, an option adopted by many scholars³.

These two major interpretative categories present the reader with two ways of reading the text. The first is focused more on the grammatical rules which define the meaning in the context, while the second on a contextual reading of ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος which defines the grammatical rules to be applied. Does one have to choose between these two options? Is there a *via media* that can reconcile these two interpretative categories?

2. Between Grammar and Context

In order to understand the meaning of the expression ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος, both the grammatical rules and the context have to be taken into account. The syntax permits several ways of translating this expression. Among these, (1) “from the Lord of the Spirit”, (2) “from the Spirit of the Lord,” (3) “from the Lord, the Spirit”, (4) “from the Lord who is the Spirit”, (5) “from the Lord who is Spirit”, (6) “from the Spirit who is the Lord”, (7) “from the Spirit, who is Lord”, (8) “from the Spirit, who is from the Lord”⁴. Facing this semantic plethora, it becomes obvious

meaning excludes all possible ambiguity” (Buttmann 1891, p. 343).

² This is Buttmann’s position (*ibid.*).

³ See Bauer 2000, p. 832: πνεῦμα. While under the article πνεῦμα, BDAG presents also the translation “Lord of the Spirit”, under the article ἀπὸ only “the Lord, who is the Spirit” is presented (p. 107). Silva (2014, s.v. ἀναγινώσκω (1:279) and μορφή (3:340)) also agrees with the appositional option. Lohse (1964-1973, 6:776) adheres to “the Lord of the Spirit”. Among those who embrace the appositional translation “the Lord who is the Spirit” are: Lenski 1961, p. 947; Furnish 1984, p. 242; Martin 1986, p. 57; Best 1987, p. 34; Belleville 1996, 2Cor 3:18; Matera 2003, p. 97; Long 2004, p. 167; Harris 2005, p. 318; Seifrid 2014, p. 186; Guthrie 2015, p. 229; Kruse 2015, p. 137. Coming closer to the appositional translation, Barnett (1997, p. 208-209) translates the expression as “the Lord, the Spirit”. He interprets the spirit as referring both to (1) the act of giving the Spirit by Jesus and to (2) the characterisation of Christ’s covenant by the “spirit” as opposed to the “letter”. Duff (2015, p. 207) also agrees with the appositional translation “the Lord, the Spirit”, arguing from the context (2Cor 3:17a) that the *Spirit* should be identified with the *Lord*. The same translation is favoured by Schneider (1990, 1:125).

⁴ Among commentators, Thrall probably offers the longest list, with seven possible options: (1) “a sovereign Spirit”, (2) “the Lord of the Spirit”, (3) “the Spirit which is the Lord”, (4) “the Lord who is Spirit”, (5) “the Lord the Spirit”, (6) “A Yahweh who is Spirit”, (7) “the Spirit of the Lord”. She prefers option (7). For details, see Thrall (1994, p. 287).

that the context needs to be taken into account in order to arrive at a satisfactory meaning. For this, several steps are taken. First, the meaning of the terms πνεῦμα and κύριος in 2 Corinthians 3 is explored. Second, similar constructions are analysed. Third, the role of the expression in Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3 is investigated. The purpose of these three steps is to find a translation that best suits the context.

3. The Terms πνεῦμα and κύριος in 2 Corinthians 3

The word πνεῦμα appears seventeen times in 2 Corinthians⁵. In 2 Corinthians 3, the term occurs seven times. In verse 3, πνεῦμα is emphatically contrasted (ἀλλά) with μέλας ('ink'). It is associated with the writing on ἐν πλαξίν καρδίαις σαρκίνας ('on tablets of hearts of flesh'). It seems that here it refers to the Holy Spirit (see Martin 1986, p. 52; Harris 2005, p. 273). The next two occurrences of πνεῦμα are in verse 6, set in a double contrast. The new covenant (διαθήκη) is of πνεῦμα, which is emphatically contrasted with the covenant of γράμμα ('letter'). The second contrast is weaker, being supported by the previous one: "for the letter kills, while the spirit gives life~. Here πνεῦμα seems to refer to the effects of the work of the Spirit, taking a more functional meaning⁶. The fourth appearance of πνεῦμα is associated with the ministry (δουκονία, verse 8), which is associated with the covenant in verse 6. The meaning of the term πνεῦμα here seems to be also functional. The next two instances are in verse 17. In another challenging expression, πνεῦμα is associated in a subject-predicate nominative construction that appears to be a convertible proposition semantic relationship ("the Lord is the Spirit or the Spirit is the Lord")⁷. The second part of the verse, presents the sixth occurrence of πνεῦμα as the subject of a new verbless clause, having as its genitive of relationship the term κυρίου. In the first clause, πνεῦμα can refer to the Holy Spirit who has the same characteristics and power as God⁸. The last occurrence is in verse 18.

The term κύριος appears 29 times in 2 Corinthians, and five times in the third chapter⁹. All occurrences in 2 Corinthians 3 are concentrated in the last three verses. In verse 16, when a person turns to the Lord, the veil that darkens

⁵ 2 Cor 1:22; 2:13; 3:3, 6, 8, 17-18; 4:13; 5:5; 6:6; 7:1, 13; 11:4; 12:18; 13:13.

⁶ See Garland (1999, p. 166), who presents the letter and the Spirit as "two different ways of rendering service to God under the two different covenants". Thrall (1994, p. 235) agrees, understanding the Spirit here as "a divine agency at work within human life".

⁷ For the terminology, see Wallace (1996, p. 40-46).

⁸ Barrett (1973, p. 123) agrees, stating that "[it] is in the realm of action (cf. I Cor. xv. 45) rather than of person (or of substance, as Lietzmann says) that the terms *Lord* and *Spirit* are identified". Contra Seifrid (2014, p. 175), who argues that in verse 17a the Spirit identifies God's being "as essentially communicative and self-giving".

⁹ 2 Cor 1:2-3, 14; 2:12; 3:16-18; 4:5, 14; 5:6, 8, 11; 6:17-18; 8:5, 9, 19, 21; 10:8, 17-18; 11:17, 31; 12:1, 8; 13:10, 13.

understanding is removed. While the term κύριος can refer both to God the Father or to Jesus Christ, here it probably refers to God¹⁰. The next two occurrences are in verse 17. If the Spirit working in the new covenant is the Lord of the old covenant (Harris 2005, p. 318; Duff 2015, p. 207) then the first clause of verse 17 can be translated as “and the Spirit is the Lord”. In this case, the placement of κύριος at the beginning of the clause emphasizes who is πνεῦμα¹¹. This would fit with the usage of πνεῦμα in the second clause as the subject nominative¹². The last two appearances of κύριος in 2 Corinthians 3 are in verse 18. The Christians are transformed by beholding τὴν δόξαν κυρίου (“the glory of the Lord”)¹³. The last appearance is in the final clause of verse 18.

4. Similar Expressions to κυρίου πνεύματος in 2 Corinthians 3

The first expression similar to κυρίου πνεύματος occurs in verse 3: πνεύματι Θεοῦ ζῶντος (“the Spirit of the living God”). While there are other translations possible for this expression¹⁴, given that the expression Θεοῦ ζῶντος is used in reference to God in other places¹⁵ probably here it also refers to God the Father. The word πνεῦμα here may be an unique reference to the Holy Spirit¹⁶.

¹⁰ Furnish (1984, p. 234-235) recognises that there is a debate whether we have God or Christ in verse 16. He argues from the larger context that it is about God. Thrall (1994, p. 274) also agrees, arguing that the OT background imposes the reference to God in verse 16. Harris (2005, p. 308) also agrees. Contra Hughes (1962, p. 115), who argues for Christ here, based on 2 Corinthians 2:16, 18. Verse 14 does not help to support the reference to Jesus. It states that the veil is removed in Christ, which can make κύριος of verse 16 to refer either to Jesus, to whom people turn and have the veil removed, or to God, to whom people turn through Christ (2 Cor 3:4). A third option is the Holy Spirit (see Witherington III 1995, p. 382).

¹¹ See Barrett (1973, p. 122), who takes the article ὁ (from ὁ δὲ κύριος) as anaphoric. As such, his translation of the first clause of verse 17 is “Now ‘the Lord’ is the Spirit”.

¹² Harris (2005, p. 311) adds that this position has two advantages: (1) it interprets 2 Corinthians 3:17a within the immediate context and (2) it offers a better interpretation of the use of the article for the term κύριος.

¹³ This expression is an allusion to passages like Exodus 16:7; 24:17. The OT background of 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 is Exodus 34:28-35. Guthrie (2015, p. 226) argues that Moses met the “person of the Holy Spirit” on the mountain, which is probably not what Paul wants to state here.

¹⁴ Like, for example, “the living Spirit of God”. This can be supported with the idea expressed in 2 Corinthians 3:6, where πνεῦμα is described as giving life.

¹⁵ Cf. Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26; 1 Thes 1:9; 1 Tim 3:15; 4:10; Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; Rev 7:2.

¹⁶ See Martin (1986, p. 52). Given that in 2 Corinthians 13:13 there is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit, the word πνεῦμα can refer to the third person of the Godhead in this epistle. Contra Furnish, who argues that the purpose of the 2 Corinthians 3:16 is not to “‘define’ the Spirit or to indicate anything very precise about the relationship of *the Spirit* to *the*

The second expression is πνεῦμα κυρίου in verse 17. Based upon the parallelism with verse 3, an identification of κύριος with Θεός is possible. In this case, the argument that κύριος refers to God the Father is strengthened; hence, the reference to the Spirit of God, namely the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians, there are two other places where Θεός is related with πνεῦμα (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). Both depict God (Θεός) as giving Christians the ἀρραβώνα τοῦ πνεύματος (“the pledge of the Spirit”).

5. The Role of ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος in the argument of 2 Corinthians 3

Second Corinthians 3 is part of a larger unit (2 Cor 2:14-4:1) which is built around three elements: (1) a depiction of Paul’s ministry as a triumph (2 Cor 2:14-16a), (2) a series of questions and answers (2 Cor 16b-3:6), and (3) a depiction of Paul’s ministry as a new covenant (2 Cor 3:7-18)¹⁷. In 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, Paul presents an antithesis between the ministry of death and the ministry of the spirit¹⁸. The contrast is created through the imagery of the veil (κάλυμμα, 2 Cor 3:13) by using three polarities. First, Paul contrasts Moses’ veiled glory with his unveiled glory (2 Cor 3:7). Second, he points out that even the unveiled glory of Moses’ face was transitory (τὴν δόξαν τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τὴν καταργουμένην, “the passing-away glory of his face”, 2 Cor 3:7), compared with the permanent glory of the new covenant (τὸ μένον ἐν δόξῃ, “the one which remains in glory”, 2 Cor 3:11). Third, Paul sets in contrast the unveiled glory of Moses’ face with the glory of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:14-15). When people repent, the veil is removed and God’s purpose is fulfilled¹⁹. When this spiritual transformation takes place, what was previously only external (in letter) becomes internal (in spirit). As mentioned above,

Lord?” (Furnish 1984, p. 236). Furnish may overstate his case, because just a few sentences above on the same page, he mentions that the first clause of verse 17 indicates that the Lord is God who operates through the Spirit in the new covenant, already indicating a relation.

¹⁷This is the structure Talbert (2002, p. 171-177) proposes.

¹⁸The OT background for Paul’s presentation is found in Exodus 34:29-35. Balla (2007, p. 753) notes that, although Paul uses this OT background, in 2 Corinthians 3:16 he quotes “only a short sentence from it in a changed form”.

¹⁹Moses’ glorious radiance is disturbing for the people, so he has to wear the veil. His face shines because he has seen God directly. Paul uses the metaphor of Moses’ radiance to illustrate the glory of the real covenant. It is the unwillingness of the people that makes the veil necessary. Even if God wanted a direct relation with his people, they refused it, asking for the Moses-veil (Ex. 20:19) even before Exodus 34. Paul argues that Moses wanted to reveal people a deeper meaning of the covenant, but they refused it. As such, they resumed their religious behaviour to the letter written in stone (an allusion to the Decalogue). The real purpose of the giving of the Ten Commandments was to create the awareness of the need of internal transformation, a spiritual transformation. Guthrie agrees, stating that “God’s ultimate goal was for his covenant people to experience his presence and thus his glory” (Guthrie 2015, p. 224).

the Lord over this work is the Holy Spirit which brings true spiritual freedom (2 Cor 3:17).

Paul switches the imagery of veiling from Moses' face (2 Cor 3:13), to Israelites' heart (2 Cor 3:14-16), and to Christians' face (2 Cor 3:18) which seems to be synonym with the heart mentioned in the case of the Israelites. Under the new covenant, the converted Christians have their understanding "unveiled" (περιαιρεῖται τὸ κάλυμμα, "the veil is taken away", 2 Cor 3:16), and they reflect God's glory. This glory is the initial, unveiled glory that shone on Moses' face, representing God's ideal plan²⁰. From this initial glory, the believers are transformed from into a fuller glory (ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, "from glory to glory", 2 Cor 3:18), which may well point to the process of sanctification.

Paul compares this transformation (καθάπερ, *just as*, 2 Cor 3:18) with ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος²¹. If the first ἀπὸ denotes source and the δόξης εἰς δόξαν the "direction of transformation" (Harris 2005, p. 316) then, given the comparative nature of *καθάπερ*, a good possibility for the second ἀπὸ would be also source. As in verse 17a, it seems that in v. 18 the Spirit is the source of the spiritual transformation. But what the verse 18 appears to emphasize is that this source of transformation is ruling over the entire process. Hence, the translation of ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος could be "from the Spirit, who is the Lord [over the process of transformation as God was in the old covenant]". In this case, the genitive κυρίου is taken as apposition, echoing the idea of ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν (2 Cor 3:17a).

6. Conclusion

The argument presented above can be summarized as follows. First, the term πνεῦμα in 2 Corinthians 3:18 seems to refer to the Holy Spirit and his activity. Second, the term κύριος appears to be an indication of God the Father and his activity. Third, the context of verse 18 indicates a progression from the unveiled glory of Moses' face to God's unveiled glory. The expression ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν is compared with ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος. The preposition ἀπὸ designates the idea of source, for both expressions. In addition, verse 18 emphasizes the specific role of the Spirit as the Lord over the process of spiritual transformation. The meaning of ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος is, in this case, "from the Spirit, who is the Lord". As in

²⁰ This interpretation integrates the option Harris chooses, while avoiding the pitfalls of the others. Harris notes several interpretations for ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν: (1) from the glory of the old covenant to the glory of the new one; (2) from the glory of the Lord to the glory of the believer; (3) from the glory received in regeneration to the final glory. He supports the third option. For details, see Harris 2005, p. 316-317.

²¹ Thrall (1994, p. 287) notes two options relative to the meaning of *καθάπερ*: (1) if ἀπὸ δόξης is taken as a genitive of source, then the comparison is with the Spirit as a source of transformation; *καθάπερ* is translated with "just as"; (2) if ἀπὸ δόξης it is not translated as a genitive of source, then *καθάπερ* would be "as happens when one is transformed".

the OT, the Lord wanted the Israelites to live in God's unveiled glory, so in the NT the God wants the people to live under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, in an unveiled glory that surpasses that of the old covenant.

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