

The Five Solas: Sola Scriptura

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on September 24, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ We're taking a brief break from our Daniel series for a miniseries on the Reformation. This year we're commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. And it's not just for history buffs. **The Reformation is relevant to all of us because the very gospel you hear preached in our church every week is the same gospel that the Reformers sought to recover and reclaim for the Catholic Church.** It's the same gospel that led to their rejection by the pope, bishops, and priests. It's the same gospel that compelled many Reformers to accept exile, torture, and martyrdom.
 - It's the gospel that can be summarized by five slogans known as the *Five Solas*. **It's the gospel that says salvation is only to be found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.** *Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Solus Christus, and Soli Deo Gloria* – these five Latin phrases encapsulate what the Reformers taught, fought, and died for.

- ❖ This morning we're going to focus on *Sola Scriptura*, and to do that I'd like to introduce you to another Reformer. **Maybe you've never hear his name before, but I'm certain all of you have benefited from his labor and sacrifice.** “*Let there be light.*” (Gn. 1:3) “*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*” (Mt. 6:9) “*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*” (Mt. 26:41) “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.*” (Jn. 1:1) “*Fight the good fight.*” (1 Tim. 6:12)
 - If those verses are familiar to you, if those English words, if that phraseology is in any way precious to you, then you have the **English Reformer William Tyndale** to thank. His pioneering work of translating the Greek NT into English was used as the basis for the Authorized Version (1611), which is more commonly known as the King James Bible. Ninety percent of the King James is from Tyndale's New Testament!

- ❖ Now I realize making an English Bible seems rather mundane. What's the big deal? **But in Tyndale's day, there was only one authorized version of the Bible – the Latin Vulgate.** And by the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church had instituted a policy of burning all translations of the Bible including the translators themselves. So a death warrant was issued for Tyndale. Again you're probably wondering what's the big deal? Why would you kill someone for translating the Bible into their native tongue?
 - **There were surface reasons for opposing an English Bible, but there were also deeper reasons that went unspoken.** On the surface it was argued that English was unworthy of the exalted language of God's Word, and it was feared that errors could slip in during the translation process so it's better not to translate at all.

- ❖ But the deeper, underlying reason for opposing the English Bible with such vehemence was **the fear that individual believers would read the Bible for themselves and discover that certain doctrines so central to the Catholic Church were simply not taught in Scripture.** They would discover that the legitimacy of the papacy and priestly class could not stand the scrutiny of Scripture. And neither could ideas like penance, purgatory, or the issuing of indulgences. **These doctrines were propped up by Tradition and not Scripture.**

- ❖ The Catholic Church insisted that the Bible is far too obscure and difficult for untrained laypersons to read for themselves, which is why God authorized the papacy and its teaching office to do the reading and interpreting for us. So just listen to your priest as he teaches you the official teachings and traditions of the Church. That's all you need. **Tradition had been elevated to an authority equal that of Scripture.** And to preserve that balance, the Church did whatever it took to remain the sole interpreters – even if it meant burning new Bible translations and the translators themselves.
 - So Tyndale was forced to flee England. He ended up in Germany. Likely met Martin Luther who himself had translated a German Bible. **And in 1525, Tyndale completed his NT and began a covert operation of smuggling English Bibles into England.** He managed to bring in over 16,000 copies. He remained in exile for twelve years as he wrote more books and worked on an English OT. Eventually he was betrayed by an associate, arrested in Antwerp, and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. His last words were, “*Lord! Open the King of England's eyes!*”

- ❖ William Tyndale gave his life for the gospel and for the conviction that Scripture alone is our final authority and *does not* share an equal authority with tradition or the teaching office of the Church. The Reformers called Scripture the ‘*norma normans non normata*’, meaning ‘the norming norm that is not normed’.
 - It's the standard that sets all standards. **To be ‘the norming norm’ means that Scripture is the ultimate norm (authority) for Christian faith and practice, so it can't be subservient to – or just equal to – another authority.** Whether it be the Catholic Church, a creedal statement, a denominational council, or just your favorite Christian author. Scripture is the norming norm that is not normed.

- ❖ That's what *Sola Scriptura* is all about. But of course, if we believe in *Sola Scriptura*, then we better make sure these ideas are actually taught in Scripture. So that's my goal today. I want to turn our attention to one of the most well known passages on the doctrine of Scripture. It's found in 2 Timothy 3, and as we'll see there are three implications for the Christian life if you believe in *Sola Scriptura*.

Scripture Alone Can Make You Wise for Salvation

- ❖ The first is this: **Because Scripture alone can make you wise for salvation, there is nothing more important to read.** *Sola Scriptura* implies that out of all the things you could be reading or watching or podcasting – out of all the solid, biblical resources out there at our disposal – in the end, there is nothing more important and more vital than regularly ingesting a healthy dose of Scripture. Because Scripture alone makes you wise for salvation.
 - We see that taught in v14 of our text. Let me give you a little background first. This is a letter from the Apostle Paul to his disciple Timothy who has been pastoring the church in Ephesus. **Timothy apparently is a young man at this time and faced with opposition from false teachers challenging the gospel that Paul passed down to Timothy and the Ephesian church.**

- ❖ So throughout this letter, Paul has written to Timothy to not be ashamed of the Gospel (1:8), to follow the pattern of sound words he learned from him (1:13), to guard those gospel doctrines (1:14), to endure suffering for it (2:12), to rightly handle the word of truth (2:15). And now in chapter 3:14, after just warning a verse earlier that these false teachers, these imposters, "*will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.* ¹⁴*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it* ¹⁵*and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*"

- ❖ **So here Paul gives Timothy two reasons to continue in his core beliefs – to keep believing and teaching the gospel.** The first is because of Timothy's personal familiarity with those who taught him these things. You know from whom you learned it. That would include his grandmother Lois, his mother Eunice (1:5) and of course Paul himself.
 - **The second reason to continue in his core beliefs is because Timothy knows the source of Paul's teaching (his source material), which was Scripture itself.** In v15 he calls it '*the sacred writings*'. From childhood, Timothy had been acquainted with it – his mother and grandmother both read to him and taught him OT Scripture. They were his first disciples. So Paul is saying that you can trust my teaching because you know it's in line with the scriptures you were taught by your disciples.
 - Now that last part in v15 is really what I wanted to focus on. The sacred writings – Scripture – is "*able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*" **In other words, Scripture alone is sufficient to present the reader with knowledge about Christ Jesus that can save you – if coupled with faith in Christ Jesus.**

- ❖ That vital connection between knowledge and faith is so important but so commonly missed. That was the accusation laid by the Reformers at the feet of the papacy and the priestly class of their day. **They had biblical wisdom but they lacked biblical salvation because they lacked true faith in Christ Jesus – because the Jesus they trusted and taught was mired in layers and layers of unbiblical teaching and tradition.**

- ❖ Church, we have to recognize that those accusations still apply today. There are plenty of bible scholars out there with PhDs – who can lecture on the most technical issues of biblical scholarship – and yet they have no faith in Jesus as their Christ, as their Lord. They would be considered wise for lecturing on Scripture, but they have not been made wise for salvation by Scripture through faith in Christ Jesus.
 - And it's not just the bible scholars out there who can be guilty of this. We have to examine ourselves. **I enjoy reading Scripture, but I know how easy it is to love reading and studying Scripture more than knowing and communing with the Savior to whom Scripture is pointing.** Jesus condemned the religious of his day for doing just that – for diligently studying Scripture trying to find eternal life but missing the fact that Scripture bears witness about Him (cf. Jn. 5:39).

- ❖ **So remember that mere knowledge of Scripture is not able to save you, but it is sufficiently able to reveal to you the One who can.** And *Sola Scriptura* implies that no other source of revelation or teaching bears this promise. In **Isaiah 55:11**, the LORD promises that every word that goes out of my mouth “*shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it*”. Well we’re told in our text that the purpose of his Word (the sacred writings) is to save us and so it shall succeed. Only God’s Word has that kind of promise (and power) attached to it.

- ❖ So the implication is clear: If Scripture alone has the power to make you wise for salvation (through sufficiently revealing Christ, the object of saving faith), then there is nothing more important to read. Nothing more important to dedicate your time and energy to. There is no other resource of equal value to Scripture.
 - I love reading Christian books. I have a whole to-read stack on my desk. I have my favorite authors. I could easily get lost in their books. But nothing compares to Scripture. **And every day I have to fight the temptation to simply soak in my Christian books instead of my Bible.**

- ❖ Church, you have a wealth of good, godly resources at your disposal. There are so many books you could read, blogs you could follow, sermons you could podcast, videos you could watch. *Sola Scriptura* is about making sure that what you’re ingesting is solidly biblical. Make sure it aligns with Scripture. **But more than that, *Sola Scriptura* is about giving Scripture the first place in your heart, in your schedule, in your priorities – for it alone has the promise and power to make you wise for salvation.**

Scripture Alone Is Breathed-Out By God

- ❖ That’s the first implication of *Sola Scriptura*. The second is this: **Because Scripture alone is breathed-out by God, there is no higher authority in our lives.** This issue was the material cause of the Reformation. The formal cause (the big argument) was over the doctrine of justification – how a sinner can be right in the eyes of God. That relates to *Sola Fide*, which we’ll cover next week.
 - But if you’re going to have a theological debate on justification, you’ll have to ground your arguments somewhere. The Catholic Church grounded its teaching on Scripture *and* Tradition.

- ❖ That’s why the Reformers faced such a challenge in debating Catholic theologians. There opponents refused to question the validity of their traditional interpretations. If that’s what a past pope or church father taught about a passage, then that’s the official interpretation – no questions asked. **They had elevated the authority of Tradition over Scripture.**
 - *Sola Scriptura* is the corrective. It affirms the uniqueness of Scripture itself over against any human interpretation of Scripture. This is where 2 Timothy 3:16 is so helpful. It says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God.*”

- ❖ Now in Greek, that phrase ‘*breathed out by God*’ is just one word *theopneustos*. It comes from the word *theos* meaning ‘God’ and *pneustos* which carries the root word for ‘to breathe’. Taken together the word literally means ‘God-breathed’. **Paul is saying that all Scripture originates from the breath (mouth) of God.**
 - Now in some older English translations, it says that all Scripture is ‘*inspired by God*’ or ‘*given by inspiration of God*’. Perhaps you’ve heard of the doctrine of inspiration, which describes this idea that Scripture comes from the breath of God.

- ❖ Now inspiration is a good term, but the word itself could give the wrong impression. It comes from the Latin for ‘to breathe *into*’. So to say that God inspired Scripture, you might get the impression that Scripture is something that previously existed (written by human hands) and then God inspires it by breathing *into* it. **That would imply Scripture was first the mere words of man, but then at a later point, upon inspiration, it became the words of God.**
 - But that’s the exact opposite of what Paul is saying. When he says “*all Scripture is theopneustos*”, he’s saying that God’s breath actually brought Scripture into existence. **So to be more precise, instead of saying God inspired Scripture, we should say he exhaled Scripture.** That’s why the ESV translates it as “*breathed out by God*”.

- ❖ Now granted, in v16, Paul is not fleshing out a full theory of inspiration. He’s only addressing God’s contribution to the origin of Scripture. The human component is not even mentioned. For that you would have to consider a passage like **2 Peter 1:21**, which says “*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”
 - So Peter, along with Paul, affirms that all Scripture ultimately originates, not in the will of man, but in the will of God. **And it’s communicated through his breath to human authors who were carried along by the Holy Spirit to record God-inspired words on the pages of Scripture.**

- ❖ Unlike what Islam teaches concerning the *Quran* or what the Latter-Day Saints teach concerning the *Book of Mormon*, Christianity does not teach that the Bible was simply dictated, word for word, by God to human authors.
 - **If you just read Luke’s introduction to his Gospel (1:1-4), it’s obvious the human authors of Scripture were not mindless puppets or human keyboards.** Luke says he researched the events of Jesus’ life. He borrowed from other sources and eyewitness accounts, and he even expressed his motivation for writing a Gospel. “*It seemed good to me.*” Luke had his own authorial intent behind what he wrote.

- ❖ My point is that Luke’s authorial intent should not be seen as separate or opposed to God’s intent. They are one and the same. **Scripture has a dual authorship.** On one hand, the biblical authors were consciously engaged in the writing process, incorporating their unique personalities and styles. **But ultimately the Spirit of God was superintending the entire process, so that every word recorded in Scripture was the word God intended to record and every meaning intended by the human author, God intended to mean.**

- ❖ *What is the point of all this?* Remember Paul is trying to fortify Timothy's confidence in the scriptures that he had been taught. **The more you understand and believe the very words of Scripture to be the very words of God, the more willing you are to submit to what it teaches – even in the face of opposition.**
- ❖ Church, you can be sure that waves of cultural opposition to what Scripture teaches will continue to push against us. **But if you believe Scripture alone is breathed-out by God, then Scripture alone becomes your highest authority.** No other authority will sway you from the words of Scripture.
 - There are plenty of authorities out there trying to influence and shape how you think and how you behave. The popular opinion, the cultural consensus, the pressure of peers – those are extremely influential authorities in our lives that many greatly fear to offend. Then there's "settled science" and what we're told all educated, open-minded people think – to resist bowing to the pressure of these authorities is difficult.
- ❖ Now don't get me wrong. I'm not outright dismissing all other authorities but the Bible. I'm not saying we have nothing to learn from authorities in the culture or in the sciences. **But *Sola Scriptura* is say that we cannot hold God's Word (and what it teaches) subservient to any other authority.** Scripture alone is our final authority.
 - In the same way, I want to be clear that I'm not promoting a kind of individualistic piety that says, "All I need is Me, God and my Bible". I'm certainly not rejecting the authority of church elders, biblical teachers, or church tradition. We're talking about *Sola Scriptura* not *Solo Scriptura*.
- ❖ We still need the church, its leaders, and its tradition, and we're still to submit them. But only if the church, its leaders, and its traditions are submitted to God's Word. **Scripture is not the only authority in Christian faith and practice but it is the final one.**
 - This is why we have no issue reciting the Nicene Creed as part of our worship. It's not God's Word, but it stands the test of God's Word. And we have no qualms promoting good Christian books and commentaries – as long as they teach you God's Word. And we unashamedly urge you to join a church (if not this one) and formally commit yourself and submit yourself under the mutual authority of the congregation and its leaders. **Commentators and bible teachers, elders and deacons – they all play a ministerial role in the church not a magisterial one.**

Scripture Alone Is Able To Complete You In Christ

- ❖ Scripture is the only magisterial authority in the life of the Christian because only Scripture is breathed-out by God. That's the second implication of *Sola Scriptura*. Let's conclude with the third implication. It goes like this: **Because Scripture alone is able to complete you in Christ, there is no need to seek after additional revelation.**

- ❖ **I think it's common for Christians to love Scripture but still long for something more.** We know God speaks through the Bible, but we wish he'd communicate with us in a more direct, more personal manner. Maybe through a still soft voice or some indelible impression? Maybe through a dream or some ecstatic vision or through a modern day prophet? We want to hear from God in more than just Scripture.
 - And I'm not trying, at this moment, to get into the debate over whether God still speaks today in these ways. That could be a whole sermon series in itself. I'm not focusing on whether God does or doesn't. **I'm focusing on us whether we're satisfied with Scripture alone.** Is Scripture sufficient for us or do we long for more?

- ❖ Let me give you an example. I might rustle a few feathers so sorry in advance. There is a very popular devotional out there called *Jesus Calling*. If you're familiar, it's organized as a daily devotional with each day's entry written from the first-person from God's perspective. The author claims to have received these messages from the Lord and wanted to share them.
 - In the book's introduction, she explains that she was inspired by an old devotional book called *God Calling*. It was written by two anonymous women who said they practiced waiting quietly in God's Presence, pen and paper in hand, recording the messages they received from Him. She felt inspired to do the same.

- ❖ She goes on to write, *"The following year, I began to wonder if I, too, could receive messages during my times of communing with God. I had been writing in prayer journals for years, but that was one-way communication: I did all the talking. I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God had to say to me personally on a given day. I decided to listen to God with pen in hand, writing down whatever I believe He was saying."*
 - **"I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible, but I yearned for more."** She's willing to affirm that Scripture is inspired and inerrant, but in her mind Scripture is insufficient. She yearns for more. A more personal word from the Lord.

- ❖ Again my question is not whether God *can* speak to us through a personal, private revelation. **My question is whether you would be satisfied with what God has spoken to you in Scripture if, in the end, he never spoke to you privately?** Is Scripture enough for you?
 - I believe Paul is arguing in vv16-17 that Scripture should be enough for you. It's all you need to lead a fulfilled and complete Christian life. Look at v16 again, *"¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

- ❖ Paul describes four ways in which Scripture profits us, which can be viewed as two pairs. Scripture is sufficient *'for teaching'* and *'for reproof'* – that's one pair. They have to do with our Christian convictions. Scripture is also *'for correction'* and *'for training in righteousness'* – that's another pair, which relates to our Christian conduct.

- ❖ Let's consider the first pair. **When Paul says that Scripture is profitable 'for teaching' and 'for reproof', he means Scripture informs and shapes our Christian convictions by teaching us sound doctrine.** And on the flip side, Scripture exposes any bad doctrine we might hold. It sets straight any crooked convictions we might have.
 - Sound doctrine is biblical doctrine. *Are your core beliefs grounded in Scripture?* Can you support your views with Scripture verses properly interpreted within their context? Don't be satisfied with groundless convictions you simply adopt from others without searching Scripture to see if what you've been taught aligns (cf. Acts 17:11).

- ❖ Now let's consider the second pair. **Paul goes on to say that Scripture is profitable 'for correction' and 'for training in righteousness'.** The Bible is there to correct you, to train you. Think about this. If you're reading Scripture as the very breathed-out words of God, then there's really no way to be a passive reader. It's not like reading a normal book!
 - When you read a book, it's usually there to inform you with data. You read it. You study it for information. But Scripture is unique, being the very Word of God. **You not only read and interpret it. It reads and interprets you.**
 - The Bible doesn't just teach you about sin. It exposes *your* sin. It doesn't just teach you God's laws. It demands that *you* obey them. It doesn't just record facts about Jesus. It introduces *you* to him and calls you to lay down your life at the feet of the very One who laid down his life for you on the cross. **Scripture reveals a loving Savior who defeated death, so that if you trust in him, you too might live beyond the grave.**

- ❖ No other book does this. No other book reads you and interprets you. But that's the power of a God-breathed book. Scripture alone – Paul goes on to say in v17 – is able to make you complete, equipped for every good work.
 - **Now when Paul says 'good work', he doesn't just mean church work.** Scripture is not just there to equip you for teaching Sunday School, leading a bible study, or preaching a sermon. Every good work is broad enough to include all of daily duties and responsibilities – at home, at school, at work, and at church.

- ❖ If I want to be a godly husband to my wife, a good father to my daughter, a great friend to my peers, and a loving shepherd to this congregation, I don't need to wait for a vision from God to tell me what to do. I don't need a private message. **Scripture alone is sufficient to make me complete and equip me to do the good works God has prepared for me to do.**
 - If you recognize within yourself a restlessness towards Scripture and a yearning for more than the Bible to make you complete in God and equipped for godly living – if you too quickly close your Bible and seek after additional revelation or resources – then I urge you to repent and recommit yourself to God and God's Word.