

ALONE : SOLA SCRIPTURA

In this third study on Reformation fundamentals, we look at the idea of 'Scripture alone' or *Sola Scriptura*. Marty Foord, writing for Gospel Coalition,¹ highlights that, prior to the reformation:

"A variety of medieval theologians believed that the institutional church's leadership, the bishops headed by the Pope (technically called the "magisterium"), were the true interpreters of Scripture. This effectively placed the teaching authority of the bishops over Scripture itself. The magisterium then could not be questioned." In 1415, the Council of Constance had wrongly ordered John Hus be put to death. In a debate with John Eck at Leipzig in 1519, Martin Luther questioned the infallibility of the magisterium in making that decision.

Foord notes three implications of *Sola Scriptura*:

1. "Firstly, *sola scriptura* meant **Scripture was the supreme authority over the church**. ... the Bible was the supreme authority that ruled reason and tradition because Scripture alone was infallible precisely because it is God's word. All other authorities (including church leadership) were fallible and must submit to Scripture. As Heinrich Bullinger said: "As God's word is confirmed by no human authority, so no human power is able to weaken its strength".²
2. "The second aspect to *sola scriptura* was **the sufficiency of Scripture**. The Catholic church in the sixteenth century affirmed that Scripture needed supplementation with various rituals and beliefs not be found in Scripture. ... the Bible is sufficient for final salvation. Scripture equips believers with all that is needed to be saved and persevere to ultimate salvation."
3. "The third element of *sola scriptura* is **the clarity of Scripture**. ... The clarity of Scripture denoted that any person could read Scripture for themselves and discover the basic way of salvation. The reformers did agree that parts of Scripture were difficult to understand. But these passages did not threaten the sufficiency of Scripture. Rather, the unclear parts of Scripture were to be interpreted in light of its clear parts. Indeed, it was the clarity of Scripture that helped drive the reformers to translate the Bible into the common tongue."

READ: 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

10 *You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that all God's people [or the servant of God] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

🗨️ What things stood out for you, from the sermon this week?

🗨️ In 2 Tim 3:10-11, what are the things that Paul wanted Timothy to take note of, about his life and ministry? Which of these things would people see in your life – and take note of?

🗨️ In 2 Tim 3:12, Paul regards persecution and suffering as inevitable when we are wanting to live a godly life. Why do you think there is a connection between these two things?

🗨️ Reflect on 2 Tim 3:13. Some people seem to be impressive and credible, but they are engaging in false and misleading conduct. In one workplace, I watched bosses act deceptively towards clients, but then also act deceptively towards each other. What are some of the characteristics of people who are committed to truth? Are 'truth-tellers' necessarily more trustworthy people?

📌 In this letter, Paul told Timothy to "teach others well" (2 Tim 2:2), "rightly explaining the word of truth". (2 Tim 2:15) This contrasts with the actions of people like Hymenaeus and Philetus "who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place ... upsetting the faith of some" (2 Tim 2:17-19) Others were engaging in "stupid and senseless controversies." (2 Tim 2:23) A critical message that Paul was conveying to Timothy in this letter, was the need to be committed to the truth that had been passed onto him and to not only teach that message, but also to live that out.

¹ <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-real-meaning-of-sola-scriptura/>

² Bullinger, *De Scripturae Sanctae 8*, Heinrich Bullinger, *De Scripturae Sanctae Autoritate, Certitudine, Firmitate Et Absoluta Perfectione* (Zurich: Christoffel Froschouer, 1538), 20a.

☞ Read 2 Tim 2:20-26, 2 Tim 4:1-5 and 1 Thess 2:1-8. What do these verses tell us about some essential characteristics of a Christian leader and teacher? What do they teach us about how we need to conduct ourselves, as we share and live out the gospel message? What do they say about our motives for ministry?

☞ Timothy had been taught the requirements of God's word from his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, from the time he was young. (2 Tim 1:5) Who are some of the people who have instructed you about God's word and who told you about how to be saved? What do you remember about them, about their lives and their legacy in your life?

☞ When they were younger, two of my daughters did athletics and were part of relay teams. The baton changes are critical phase in the race. Similarly, Paul knew the importance of discipling and teaching others, who would then make disciples and teach the next generation.

- In 1 Cor 15:3, Paul wrote: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I had in turn had received ..."
- In 2 Tim 2:14, Paul wrote: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and fully believed, knowing from whom you have learned it."

What are some of the limitations, of us relying purely on an 'oral tradition', for information to be passed from generation to generation? Why did John commit his story to writing? (Jn 20:30-31)

❗ Matthew Barrett notes that "in 1561 those who penned the Belgic Confession confessed, "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein." In the next century, 1646 to be exact, those divines at the Westminster Assembly also wrote up a confessional statement and it too confessed sufficiency: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men [Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15-17]." ³

☞ In 2 Tim 2:15-17, we read that the "sacred writings ... are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." What are the other things that Paul said, that is Scripture "useful for"?

☞ What does it mean that Scripture is "God breathed" / "inspired by God"?

❗ As Protestants, we have a 'boundary' around what comprises 'Scripture'. Our Bible comprises 66 books: 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament Books. This boundary is referred to as 'Closed Canon'. There had been many writings that circulated, particularly in the 400 years between the end of the OT period and when Jesus came, plus writings of various Christian and splinter groups. In the first 400 years after Jesus lived, there were a number of church councils. At these councils, church leaders met, deciding which writings to be accepted into the Canon and those to be rejected.⁴

☞ Phil reminded us that Scripture is not to be used like a car user/ instruction manual. Neither is a prescriptive book of commands and doctrines. It is a story, within which we find our life story finds its purpose. What did you learn about the story line of Scripture, that Phil provided?

- Act 1: Creation (Gen 1-2)
- Act 2: The Fall (Gen 3-11)
- Act 3: The time of the nation of Israel
- Act 4: Life and ministry of Jesus
- Act 5: The church on mission
- Act 6: Living in the presence of God

APPLICATION: Reflect on the following words from Col 1:9-13, then use them to pray for each other:

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-sufficiency-of-scripture/>

⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/is-the-canon-closed/>