

The Five Solas...Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)

“I am bound by the Scriptures and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.”

(Martin Luther, “Luther at the Diet of Worms,” in Luther’s Works: The Career of the Reformer, 32:112-3.)

Sola Scriptura is the first sola for good reason. All the other solas depend on the first sola.

Ronald L Cammenga

If we leave the firm foundation of God’s Word we lose our ground to stand firm and without that, we will fall. This is why the first distinctive of the reformed tradition, and thus every reformed church, is Scripture. All the other distinctives in reformed theology flow out of this one.

Adam Powers (<https://thepublicans.org/2014/10/27/the-5-battle-cries-of-the-reformation>)

Keith Mathison on the need to return to “the old paths”...

A few years ago, I ran across a comic strip in which one of the figures says, ***“Those who don’t study history are doomed to repeat it. Yet those who do study history are doomed to stand by helplessly while everyone else repeats it.”*** This comic is a humorous, albeit somewhat cynical, play on the well-known quote by American philosopher George Santayana (1863–1952), who wrote: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” It is a well-known and widely used quote because there is much truth in it.

The truth that Santayana grasped is abundantly illustrated in the history of the modern evangelical church. ***We are a people who have forgotten our roots, and in many cases, we really don’t seem to care.*** The church exists in a world of rapidly changing technology, a world in which almost everyone has been assimilated into the incessant chatter of social media and real-time updates on everything from world politics to what your friend had for breakfast this morning. If we are to be relevant, or so we think, we too must be a people of the new and the now. The consequences of such ideas in the church are there for all to see.

Numerous polls indicate widespread biblical and theological illiteracy. Numerous professing Christians do not grasp the contents of Scripture. Those who have read the Bible often have no idea what it means and how the various parts go together. A recent study sponsored by Ligonier Ministries indicates that a large percentage of professing Christians unwittingly hold views regarding the Trinity, Jesus Christ, sin, and salvation that are technically heretical.

We are not in a good place, but we are not the first to be in such a position. The people of Israel forgot the past with disastrous consequences. The medieval church forgot the past with disastrous consequences. ***But what do you do when you realize you've taken a wrong turn somewhere along your journey? You go back and seek to find the correct path.*** We should not view the past as something that is gone and therefore useless. We should look at the past more like the way someone on the second floor of a building looks at the foundation. The foundation was built before the remaining structure. It was built in the past. But the foundation is not something that can be discarded without catastrophic results.

When the medieval church lost her way, the rediscovery of these fundamental doctrines during the Reformation helped the church regain her footing.

Keith Mathison

Ryan McGraw on the Five Solas...

Ryan McGraw

OCT 27, 2021

The five solas were not exactly Reformation slogans, but they serve as a good summary of the Reformed faith. Neither Martin Luther nor John Calvin nor any other Protestant Reformer summarized his teachings in a tidy list including Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, to the glory of God alone. Taking flight in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this fivefold summary became the shorthand version of what is known as Reformed theology.

While this description of the Reformed faith came later, it still captures well the core of the gospel in all its graciousness and Christ-centeredness, just as it is revealed in the Scriptures. ***These five solas show the glory of God's gracious way of salvation in a way that sets the tone for true theology, resounding in how we think and live in this world.***

The Five Solas of the Reformation (Excerpts)

Ronald L Cammenga (this article first appeared in the special Reformation issue of the November 1, 2017 issue of the Standard Bearer)

In the end, one little word divided the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic of the sixteenth century. To borrow Luther's language in his great Reformation hymn, "one little word felled" the corrupt Roman Catholic institute of his day. That one little word was "only," or as it is in Latin, sola. The Reformers said "only" or "alone," while Rome consistently said "and." The Reformers included the word "only" in especially five important doctrines that they taught. These five statements gradually became known as the "five solas."

The Reformers said that the authority in the church is sola Scriptura, that is, Scripture alone. Rome said that the authority in the church is Scripture and tradition.

The Reformers said that Christ is our only Mediator, solus Christus. Rome said that men have many mediators: Christ and angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary. The Reformers said that we are saved by grace alone, sola gratia. Rome said that we are saved by grace and on account of human merit. The Reformers said that we are saved by faith only, sola fide. Rome said that we are saved by faith and by our own works and free will. The Reformers said soli Deo gloria, to God alone be the glory. Rome said, in effect, that the glory for salvation is partly due to the grace of God and partly due to the sinner. ***Throughout, Rome insisted not on “only” or “alone,” but on “and.”***

Still today, this is the one little word that distinguishes the churches that are faithful to the Reformation from the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, this is an indicator that a church has departed, as well as the degree to which it has departed, from the Reformed faith. Is it maintaining the word “only” in the same areas and with the same tenacity as the Reformers did? If not, it has not only departed from its Reformation heritage, but it is on the slippery slope that leads back to Rome. So serious a matter are the five solas!

The five solas encapsulate the Reformation. They demonstrate what the Reformation was about and why the Reformation was necessary. From five points of view, they summarize the gospel that was restored to the church through the Reformation. And they provide the rationale for the Reformation. They account for the tremendous sacrifices that Reformed believers then and now are willing to make, even “letting goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.” So highly did the Reformers and the churches of the Reformation value these five doctrines and the pivotal place they occupied in the life of the church. Do we value them as highly as they did?

Sola Scriptura

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

The first of the five solas is sola Scriptura...Scripture alone. The Reformers taught that Scripture alone is the final authority. No one and nothing are above Scripture, nor may be placed as an authority alongside of Scripture. Scripture is the authority for the individual believer, as well as for the church as a whole. It is the authority over faith, what we believe, and it is the authority over practice, how we live our daily lives. Scripture is also determinative for the worship of the church, so that every element of worship is to be derived from Scripture.

The Reformers rejected Rome’s elevation of other authorities alongside the authority of Holy Scripture. Rome taught that the Bible is an authority in the church, in fact, a very important authority in the church. But the Bible is not the only authority. The authority in the church is the Bible and tradition, which tradition includes the writings of the church fathers, the decisions of the churches councils, the decrees of the pope, and the writings that the Roman Catholic Church added to the Bible known as the Apocrypha.

When the Reformers insisted that the Bible alone is the final authority in the church, they did not reject tradition altogether. In fact, the Reformers had the highest regard for church tradition, as well as for the decisions of many past church councils, like Nicea and Chalcedon. But they honored tradition only in so far as tradition agreed with Scripture.

The Reformers honored Scripture as the highest authority because they believed the Bible to be the divinely inspired Word of God. Scripture is the authority in the church because Scripture alone is the very Word of God. Thus, it is capable of functioning as the supreme authority in the church.

Sola Scriptura is the first sola for good reason. All the other solas depend on the first sola. They are all derived from sola Scriptura. Scripture teaches that Christ is the only Savior. Scripture teaches that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. And Scripture teaches that to God alone must be all the glory. ***If Scripture is not the only authority, the other four solas fall to the ground.***

Stephen Wellum on Sola Scriptura...

Against the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that raised church tradition to an authoritative status on par with Scripture, the Reformers rightly confessed that God alone is the final authority and source and standard of truth and that Scripture judges all human authorities.

Scripture, precisely because it is God's Word, is our final, sole infallible authority for faith and practice.

No doubt, sola Scriptura does not deny other "authorities" or even the importance of church tradition. Yet, it does rightly stress that the final authority is Scripture alone.

Only God's Word deserves and demands our total allegiance, especially on matters that Scripture addresses. The light of Scripture frees human reason and thought from the shackles of error and delusion. God's Word of truth shines light on our path so that we may truly know God and live rightly.

Why is sola Scriptura important? Because it reminds us that God is God and alone trustworthy while humans are completely dependent on him for knowledge. Contrary to secular thought, humans are thankfully not the final arbiters of truth; only God is.

Objective truth is real and we can know it because God is its source and standard and he has taken the initiative to speak to us. *All* that we know truly, even of our world, is due to God's revelation. Both the knowledge we gain from general and special revelation is a subset of "thinking God's thoughts after him."

Sola Scriptura is a truth to be gladly embraced and joyously proclaimed because it reminds us that God has graciously given us a sure Word that will never lead us astray.

Spurgeon and Sola Scriptura (Excerpts)...

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was not ashamed to be called a Calvinist and was distinctly Reformed in his preaching and teaching. In addition to the Doctrines of Grace, Spurgeon's teaching also reflected his steadfast belief in the "Five Solas" of the Reformation.

The Five Solas served as the collective rallying cry of the Protestant Reformers. These Latin phrase—Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, and Soli Deo Gloria—tell us that Scripture alone is our highest authority and that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for God's glory alone. ***These Biblical truths served as theological pillars that supported the whole of Spurgeon's ministry.***

The doctrine of Sola Scriptura, or scripture alone, is a central belief of Reformed Theology. It comes as no surprise to find that this doctrine also formed the bedrock of Spurgeon's preaching.

The following quotations are but a sampling of what Spurgeon had to say about the Five Solas. In speaking of Christ's and the Apostle Paul's views of Scripture, he said:

"Evidently, they regarded the statements of Scripture as conclusive. They took counsel of the Scriptures, and so they ended the matter. "It is written," was to them proof positive and indisputable. "Thus saith the Lord," was the final word: enough for their mind and heart, enough for their conscience and understanding.

To go "behind" Scripture did not occur to the first teachers of our faith: they heard the Oracle of divine testimony, and bowed their heads in reverence. So it ought to be with us: we have erred from the faith, and we shall pierce ourselves through with many sorrows, unless we feel that if the Scripture saith it, it is even so."

Spurgeon found the Bible to be totally authoritative and sufficient. Note the language that he uses; he does not say "go beyond" Scripture but to "go behind" it.

In terms of understanding the faith and proper practice of Christianity, there is no where outside of Scripture that we look to. To do so is not to gain insight, but to lose sight of what God has given for our instruction. If we do not acknowledge the truth of Scripture, we have "erred from the faith."

Where did Spurgeon get such confidence in the Bible's authority? Primarily, from its divine authorship.

“This volume is the writing of the living God; each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit.”

Scripture “is the writing of the living God; each letter was penned with an Almighty finger” Scripture is not a record of the words of mere men. If it was, Spurgeon states, “we might reject them.” Instead, Scripture is the very Word of God:

“This Bible is a book of authority; it is an authorized book, for God has written it.”

The Bible has God as its author, so it follows that it would be free from error. Spurgeon reached this same conclusion, stating that, “We must settle in our minds that the Word of God must certainly be true, absolutely infallible, and beyond all question.”

This understanding of Scripture’s divine authority allowed Spurgeon to preach from any passage with confidence and clarity.

Keith Mathison on “Solo” Scriptura...

What do we mean when we say that we believe in *sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone? Like all of the solas, a proper understanding of the doctrine requires a certain amount of context—both historical and theological. In the first place, we need to understand that the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* arose within the context of the late medieval Roman Catholic church and its teaching. It was a response to perceived error in the teaching of the church. So what was it that the Reformers found objectionable?

The dispute with Rome was not over the inspiration or inerrancy of Scripture. Rome affirmed both doctrines. The problem, instead, was due to the fact that over the course of many centuries, Rome had gradually adopted a view of the relation between the church, Scripture, and tradition that effectively placed final authority somewhere other than God. Tradition was conceived of as a second source of revelation, and the pope and Roman magisterium were viewed as the final authority in matters of faith and practice.

The Reformers wanted to call the church back to a view of the relation between Scripture and tradition that was found in the early church. They believed that the Bible itself taught such a view. The Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, or the Reformation doctrine of the relation between Scripture and tradition, affirms that Scripture is to be understood as the sole source of divine revelation, the only inspired, infallible, final, and authoritative norm of faith and practice. Why? Because Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). In other words, what Scripture says, God says. There is, therefore, a basic ontological difference between Scripture (God’s Word) and any creaturely words.

Scripture is metaphysically unique. Scripture is to be interpreted in and by the church, and it is to be interpreted within the hermeneutical context of the rule of faith (Acts 15).

Among evangelicals, there is a common misunderstanding of *sola Scriptura* that views the Bible not only as the sole final authority, but as the sole authority altogether. In other words, the church, the ecumenical creeds, the confessions of faith, are largely dismissed even as secondary authorities.

It is the “No creed but Christ” or “No creed but the Bible” attitude so prevalent in the church today. Of course, those who assert such slogans fail to realize that a statement such as “No creed but Christ” is itself a creed—a statement of what one believes.

Those who espouse this misunderstanding of the Reformation doctrine are often unaware that it is not the view of the early church and it is not the view of the magisterial Reformers. In fact, where one most often encounters this view historically is in the writings of various heretics (e.g., the Arians of the early church, the Socinians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, etc.). This bad version of biblicism has been the source of innumerable false doctrines.

<https://reformationbiblecollege.org/blog/the-five-solas>

Ryan McGraw on Sola Scriptura and Scripturally-grounded theology...

Theology must be Scripturally grounded. God’s life-giving speech reveals to us His salvation and calls us to faith and repentance. We were once darkness, but now we are light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers, lest they see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Yet the God who commands light to shine out of darkness shines in our hearts, giving us the light “of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). ***God works by the Spirit working through the Word. The Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture, and He speaks through Scripture (Heb. 3:7). The Scriptures teach us everything that we need to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ and to be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15–17).*** This is why those who do not speak according to the rule of Scripture have no light in them (Isa. 8:20). Yet without the Spirit, even the Scriptures cannot help us. We are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1–2), our minds and hearts are darkened (Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:21), and we need someone to raise us from the dead and turn on the lights (Eph. 5:14). ***If Scripture is sufficient to make us wise for faith and life in Christ, then Scripture alone can be our guide to walking with God.*** Everything else is both useless and superfluous. Yet we must be born of the Spirit in order to see God’s kingdom (John 3:5). ***Only through the Spirit working by and with the Scriptures in our hearts can we walk in the light with the God who is light*** (1 John 1:7).

• Inspiration...

2 Tim 3:16,17...¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19-21...¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. ²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- ***Attacks on veracity of God***

Has God said?

Genesis 3:1-5... Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" ² The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³ but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" ⁴ The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

- ***Attacks on the sufficiency of God's word...appeals to extra biblical authority***

Is there no prophet of of the Lord?...

2 Kings 3:11..¹¹ But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?"

Danger of extra-biblical "revelation"

Jesus' objections to adding the traditions of men

Matthew 15:1-9... Then some Pharisees and scribes *came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." ³ And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.' ⁵ But you say, 'Whoever says to *his* father or mother, 'Whatever I have that would help you has been given *to God*,' ⁶ he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And *by this* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:
⁸ "This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.
⁹ "But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."

Mark 7:6-13...⁶ And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.
⁷ 'But in vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

⁸ Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

⁹ He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’; ¹¹ but you say, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),’ ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; ¹³ *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.

Matthew 23:4...Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, ² saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; ³ therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger.

Luke 11:46...⁴⁶ But He said, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Colossians 2:8...⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Colossians 2:20-23...²⁰ If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹ “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” ²² (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.

1 Tim 1:3,4...³ As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith.

1 Tim 4:1-5...But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; ⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

2 Tim 4:3,4...³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Heb 13:9...⁹ Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.

• ***Jesus' response to Satan's temptations... "it is written"***

Matthew 4:4...⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:7...⁷ Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matthew 4:10...¹⁰ Then Jesus *said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

Sufficiency of God's Word...

Isaiah 8:20...^o To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

John 17:17...¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

Psalms 19:7-9...⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

Psalms 119:105...¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.

Proverbs 30:5,6...⁵ Every word of God is tested;
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

⁶ Do not add to His words
Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

Deuteronomy 4:2... Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ² Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

Deuteronomy 12:32...³² "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.

Rev 22:18,19...¹⁸ I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

2 Thessalonians 2:15...¹⁵ So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.

Jude 3...³ Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Titus 1:9,14...⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain. ¹² One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” ¹³ This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

Appendix 1...

• CFBC’s “What We Teach” on the Scriptures...

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We teach that the Bible is God’s written revelation to man, and thus the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God-breathed. We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17). We teach that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12-13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We teach that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God’s Word to man (2 Peter 1:20-21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16).

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20).

It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

• The Westminster Confession of Faith on the Scriptures...

I. Of the Holy Scripture

I. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable;^a yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation;^b therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church;^c and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing;^d which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary;^e those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.^f

a. Psa 19:1-3; Rom 1:19-20; 1:32 with Rom. 2:1; 2:14-15. • b. 1 Cor 1:21; 2:13-14. • c. Heb 1:1. • d. Prov 22:19-21; Isa 8:19-20; Mat 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 1:3-4; Rom 15:4. • e. 2 Tim 3:15; 2 Pet 1:19. • f. Heb 1:1-2.

II. Under the name of holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these (*Note- lists the 66 books of the canon of Scripture*)

All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.^a

a. Luke 16:29, 31; Eph 2:20; 2 Tim 3:16; Rev 22:18-19.

III. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.^a

a. Luke 24:27, 44; Rom 3:2; 2 Pet 1:21.

IV. The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.^a

a. 1 Thes 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19, 21; 1 John 5:9.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture;^a and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.^b

a. 1 Tim 3:15. • b. Isa 59:21; John 16:13-14; 1 Cor 2:10-12; 1 John 2:20, 27.

VI. 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.^a

Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word;^b and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.^c

a. Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thes 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15-17. • b. John 6:45; 1 Cor 2:9-12. • c. 1 Cor 11:13-14; 14:26, 40.

VII. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;^a yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.^b

a. 2 Pet 3:16. • b. Psa 119:105, 130.

VIII. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic;^a so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them.^b But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them,^c therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,^d that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner,^e and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.^f

a. Mat 5:18. • b. Isa 8:20; John 5:39, 46; Acts 15:15. • c. John 5:39. • d. 1 Cor 14:6, 9, 11-12, 24, 27-28. • e. Col 3:16. • f. Rom 15:4.

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.^a

a. Acts 15:15; 2 Pet 1:20-21.

X. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.^a

a. Mat 22:29, 31; Eph 2:20 with Acts 28:25.

Appendix 2...The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (Excerpts)

Sola Scriptura: The Erosion Of Authority

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function.

In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture and discipline.

Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, cliché's, promises. and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preachers opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given.

The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured. We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

Appendix 3...The Sufficiency of Scripture (NineMarks)

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture lies at the heart of what it means to be a Protestant. Protestantism and Roman Catholicism share much in common in terms of basic theology, such as a commitment to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. When it comes to matters of authority, however, there are major divergences. One of these is on the matter of Scripture: is Scripture sufficient as an authority for the church or not?

Scriptural sufficiency is, of course, a doctrine that stands in positive connection to a number of other theological convictions, such as inerrancy, the extent of the canon, and the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. All of these help to shape our understanding of sufficiency but are beyond the scope of this brief article.

Thus, I will focus on the doctrine as generally understood by those who accept the Protestant confessional consensus on these matters, as reflected in the Second London Confession, the Three Forms of Unity, and the Westminster Standards.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT SCRIPTURE IS SUFFICIENT?

We do of course need to parse what we mean when we say that Scripture is sufficient. If my car breaks down or I am trying to work out who committed the crime in a particularly complex whodunit, I will not find the answer in the Bible. Nor will I find discussion of the human genome, the rules of cricket, or the wing markings of North American butterflies. In fact, the scope of Scripture's sufficiency is neatly summarized in Question 3 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

In other words, the Scriptures are sufficient for a specific task: they reveal who God is, who man is in relation to him, and how that relationship is to be articulated in terms of worship.

Even with this definition, however, we need to be precise concerning the nature of this sufficiency. In some areas, the Scriptures are sufficient for teaching principles but not for providing specific details. For example, while they clearly teach that the church should gather for worship on the Lord's Day, they do not specify precise times and locations. Neither my local congregation nor the time of our services are mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. Scriptural sufficiency is not jeopardized by this lack; Scripture was never intended to speak with precision to such local details.

The last observation is perhaps obvious. A more subtle point about scriptural sufficiency can be deduced from Paul's pastoral epistles. When Paul writes these, he is laying out his blueprint for the post-apostolic church. It is thus significant that he does not simply tell Timothy and Titus to make sure there are copies of the Bible available to the church. If Scripture in and of itself were sufficient to maintaining the truth of the faith, surely that is all he would need to have done.

Instead, he not only emphasizes the importance of Scripture but also says that there is a need for officers (elders and deacons) and for adherence to a form of sound words (a tradition of creedal teaching). So to say that Scripture is sufficient for the church is not to say that it is the only thing necessary.

Officers and creeds/confessions/statements of faith (agreed forms of sound words) also seem to be a basic part of Paul's vision for the post-apostolic church.

Given these factors, there is a sense in which we might say that Protestants believe in the insufficiency of Scripture: we acknowledge that Scripture is insufficient for many of the details of everyday life, such as motorcycle maintenance and cooking curries. It is even insufficient for the day-to-day running and good health of the church: we need elders, deacons and forms of sound words.

What it is sufficient for, however, is for regulating the doctrinal content of the Christian faith and the life of the church at a principial level. That is Paul's point in 2 Timothy 3:16. In other words, to speak of scriptural sufficiency is one way of speaking about the unique authority of Scripture in the life of the church and the believer as the authoritative and sufficient source for the principles of faith and practice.

WHAT IS SCRIPTURE SUFFICIENT FOR?

We can elaborate this. First, Scripture is sufficient as the noetic ground of knowledge of God. This means that all theological affirmations are to be consistent with the teaching of Scripture. The statement "God is Trinity" is found nowhere in the Bible; but its conceptual content is there; that is why it should be affirmed by all Christians. By contrast, "Mary was conceived without original sin" is not a concept found anywhere in Scripture. Roman Catholics who affirm the notion thereby reveal their view that Scripture is not sufficient as the noetic basis for theology, but needs to be supplemented by the teaching magisterium of the church.

Second, Scripture is sufficient for Christian practice. At the level of behavior, Scripture offers principles which guide believers in their day to day lives. This can be a complicated area: the advent of Christ demands that the Old Testament law codes be read in the light of his person and work, and this issue is beyond the immediate scope of this short piece. But the principle of sufficiency is clear: given the redemptive-historical dynamic, Scripture provides fully adequate and sufficient general principles which can be applied in specific ethical situations. For example, the Bible may not reference stem cell research, but it contains principles that should shape our attitudes to such.

Third, at the level of the church as an institution, Scripture is again sufficient for the principles of both organization and public worship. In terms of organization, I have already noted the fact that Paul sees both office-bearers and creeds/confessions as vital to the ongoing health of the church. As to office-bearers, Scripture also describes the kind of men who are to be appointed. As to creeds, my first point above—that Scripture is sufficient as the norming norm of the content of doctrinal statement—is clearly relevant.

Fourth, in terms of public worship, Scripture is sufficient for establishing its elements: singing of praise, prayer, the reading and preaching of God's Word, the giving of tithes and offerings for the work of the church, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. As with creeds, Scripture is also sufficient to regulate the agenda and content of sermons, worship songs, prayers, what the money is spent on, who is baptized, and who receives the Lord's Supper.

In short, one can tell a lot about how a particular church understands scriptural sufficiency by looking at her form of government, the content and emphases of corporate worship, and the way in which the elders pastor the congregation.

By Carl Trueman

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