

Sola Scriptura
SERMON
By
Everett C. DeVelde

July 28, 2014

TEXT: 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

PROP: Since the Bible alone is inspired by God and only source of that which binds the conscience we must make every effort to study and assimilate its message.

2 Timothy 3:10-4:5 (ESV)

All Scripture Is Breathed Out by God

¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors 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. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Preach the Word

⁴ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

In modern times the light of the Protestant Reformation has been significantly dimmed and the central doctrines of the Bible set forth in the Reformation have increasingly become blurred and recast into the social doctrines practiced by so many today. But we cannot forget these doctrines because they are truths that are essential to a right and saving relationship to the True and Living God.

The Reformation had a profound effect on European civilization and later on the civilization in which we live today. It was a time of great political and economic upheaval but nowhere was the upheaval experienced more acutely than in the church. Rightly understood, the Reformation was a great revival. It was a great turning to the Lord for mercy and a return to the authority of the Bible. Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life, but the church in modern times has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice the church is guided, far too often, by the culture around it. Indeed, liberal and modernist theologians and pastors have removed themselves completely from the authority of the Bible.

We see this tendency even in churches that call themselves evangelical. In fact, the term *evangelical* no longer means what it once did. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the world of entertainment often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Modern worship practices have moved very far from the principles set forth in the Bible that regulate what our worship practices should be. As the authority of the Bible is abandoned in practice, as its truths fade from Christian consciousness the church is increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

Rather than modifying the doctrines of the church to conform to consumer desires and demands, the law of God must be proclaimed as the only standard of righteousness and the gospel as the only proclamation of saving truth. The common doctrine of the reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others is summed up under five heads, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide* and *Soli Deo Gloria*. Today we shall be considering the first of these, "*Sola Scriptura*" or Scripture Alone. To be sure there were major and significant doctrinal differences between these reformation leaders and these differences account for the presence of separate protestant denominations today.

Those who affirm *sola scriptura* believe the Bible to be the sole source of written divine revelation which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. But let us see how our text speaks to this issue.

1. We learn from the Bible alone to do what is right.

2 Timothy 3:12-15 (ESV) – 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, **13** while evil people and impostors 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.

We may question the assertion that the Bible alone teaches us to do that which is right but without the Bible, left to themselves and their own resources, people will become more and more evil. They will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived and this characterizes all of human history. If the law of God as stated in the Bible is removed from society it will only and invariably become more and more evil. We saw what happened to a President of the United States who loved to be seen leaving church with a Bible in his hand. We saw him become more and more evil because he did not meditate in the Law of God day and night nor did his pastor teach him the law of God from the book he carried. The President was typical in this regard to all of us. All of us by nature turn away from the study of and commitment to the Word of God. Who among us can say with complete honesty with the psalmist?

Psalm 119:97-99 (ESV)

- 97 Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
- 98 Your commandment makes me
wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
- 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.

Timothy, however, was to continue in the things he learned from the Scriptures from his childhood to his manhood. From the Scriptures he learned to do what is right. He learned to turn away from evil and to do what is right. All learning apart from and without the Scriptures would only, in the end, lead to evil. There is certainly nothing wrong with studying science or mathematics or language but apart from the Word of God it will only lead to evil. That is why the psalmist can say as he continues,

Psalm 119:100-104 (ESV)

- 100 I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
- 101 I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
- 102 I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.

- 103 How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
- 104 **Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.**

The importance of knowing the Bible is that it makes one wise for salvation through Faith which is in Jesus Christ. The Bible ministers to the soul and this is the great rationale for Christian education. Both the mind and the soul are educated. **If the soul is ignored in the education process civilization will increasingly move toward evil.** Timothy's parents taught him the Scriptures. Do we learn the Scriptures ourselves and do we teach the Scriptures to our children? Timothy was to continue in the things he learned from the Scriptures because any other course of action would only and inevitably lead to evil.

2. The Bible alone equips us for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

The Bible alone is inspired, breathed out, by God. It is divine revelation from the very mouth of God, as opposed to the modern view that would "understand the Bible by knowing the life situations from which it arose." (Edward J. Young) The Bible alone is the basis for anything that has any value for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. All of these things are moral issues which are based on the law of God and only the Bible gives us Law of God. We cannot rely on secular education to teach us the law of God. In fact, secular education and civil law completely ignore the soul. We are treated as if we were nothing but biological machines and accordingly our minds are educated and our bodies strengthened but our souls go begging. If we are to be equipped for every good work we must learn the Bible. Our doctrines cannot be those of modern philosophy or the agnostics and cynics of our day. Neither can the doctrines that bind our consciences be those of any creed, council or individual. It is the Bible alone that binds the conscience.

The conscience is a property of the soul that knows or feels what is right or what is wrong. The conscience is that property of the soul that decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of one's actions. To bind the conscience is to bring the conscience into conformity with the Law of God and creeds, councils or individuals may influence us to

that end only in so far as they themselves conform to the Law of God as it is found in the Bible.

The Scriptures Paul refers to are the books of the Old Testament. The New Testament did not exist yet as a collection and no doubt some of the New Testament books had not yet been written. Yet Paul considers the doctrine of the Apostles as the word of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV) – 13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

And notice Peter tells us.

2 Peter 1:16-21 (ESV) – 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **19** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, **20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. **21** 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.

Therefore, surely the teaching of the Lord Jesus is the Word of God which together with the teaching of the apostles most certainly binds the conscience. The point here is that the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the apostles are found only in the Bible. The books of the Old and New Testaments together therefore are the only source for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

If the Bible alone equips us for every good work surely we should make every effort to study it and assimilate its blessed message. By nature our consciences are wholly inclined to do evil. We cannot discern evil from righteousness. It is just as Jesus said to the Pharisees in John chapter 8 when they claimed to be sons of Abraham.

John 8:39-47 (ESV) – 39 They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, **40** but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. **41** You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him,

“We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” **42** Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. **43** Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. **44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. **45** But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. **46** Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? **47** Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

Here were men whose business it was to study the Torah and many spent their lives doing just that. But they were of their father the Devil. To be equipped for every good word we obviously must do more than study it the way the Pharisees did. It must be assimilated. It must be taken to heart. It must be believed and practiced in our lives. If the propensity to do evil is ever to be diminished in our lives we must be students of the Word because the Bible alone equips us for every good work. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* asks, “How is the word of God to be read? It answers,

“The holy scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.”

A poor prisoner confined in a dungeon had no light except for a few moments when food was brought in. He used those moments to read the Bible, saying that he could find his mouth in the dark, whereas he could not read in the dark.

Martin Luther’s Method

Martin Luther said, “I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf.

“I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb—study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters when they do not break the sense. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings.”

Spurgeon's Great Love

Few men have made the contribution to homiletical literature that was made by Charles Spurgeon. He produced 135 books; edited 28 more; and if one counts his shorter things, he topped the 200 mark! But in spite of this vast output, he stated: "The quarry of the Holy Scripture is inexhaustible; I seem hardly to have begun to labor in it; but the selection of the next block, and the consideration as to how to work it into form, are matters not so easy as some think."

Again, few of us have this sort of time to study the Bible but if we are to grow in grace and turn away from evil we simply must set aside some regular time for Bible study.

3. The Bible is the only source of sound doctrine.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 (ESV) – **1** I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **2** preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **3** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, **4** and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **5** As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Timothy is to preach the Word. Anything else is not sound doctrine and is nothing but fables. Preaching the Word involves convincing one's hearers, rebuking them, and exhorting them. Again Paul is concerned here not with one's mind or scholarly achievements but **he is concerned with the state of the soul**. What do we expect our preachers to preach about? If they are to preach the Word what do we expect to find in it. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* informs us that the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. It is a moral message and that leads us to say again that all education is profoundly moral. Modern educators are concerned not only with the three Rs, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, but with teaching us and conditioning us to accept sinful behavior as normal. Homosexual behavior is not seen as sin because there is no standard of righteousness. Abortion is not believed to be murder for the same reason. The Bible is taken out of education and out of society with the inevitable result that evil increases. Only Scripture can bind the conscience and only Scripture establishes what is right and wrong.

Since the Bible alone is inspired by God and the only source of that which binds the conscience we must make every effort to study and assimilate its message. How else can

we know the will of God regarding the moral aspects of decisions we must make? All too often our decisions are not informed by the word of God and the outcome moves us further toward evil. If we face difficult decisions and it is not clear what we should do we need to ask for help in making the decision. The elders will be glad to give counsel in spiritual matters. But all too often we obtain the counsel of the ungodly and their counsel is not informed by the Bible. The law of God touches every aspect of our lives and we need to be good students of the Bible.

May God grant the time and freedom to study his word. Sola Scriptura. 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. Amen.