

Thoroughly Equipped for Every Good Work: *Sola Scriptura* and Pastoral Ministry 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Introduction: Does This Really Matter?

It is the bottom of the ninth inning. The visitors have a three-run lead with a couple outs and no one on, when the batter manages a walk. Instead of risking a ball through the gap, the first-baseman does not hold him on but stays in his better fielding position. This effectively gives the runner second base, but he is not credited with a stolen base by the official scorer: it is labeled “defensive indifference”.

While the “articles of faith” for the church I pastor is quite clear on the Bible as the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, our only rule of faith and practice, this year’s emphasis on the great truths of the Reformation make me wonder if I have fallen prey to “defensive indifference” on “Scripture Alone”. So what if the Lutheran church down the street is sponsoring a conference in cooperation with the Catholic church that seems to imply that the Reformation was an unfortunate breach of unity. No one in my church ever questions why we always have a sermon on a text.

No one was indifferent to Scripture Alone in 1936, the year the church I pastor in Sudbury first met together. Even when I grew up in Kapuskasing in the ‘60’s and 70’s, a majority of residents of Northern Ontario would have identified with the Roman Catholic Church. While it never held the kind of political power it did in Quebec before the Quiet Revolution, it was a powerful weave in the cultural fabric. In 1936, it would be incumbent on the founders of the new Baptist congregation to make “Sola Fide” a strong theme: grace alone by faith alone still needed to be sounded. This would only be strengthened after the war as an influx of Eastern Europeans into the mining community moved in with their Catholicism.

Also a factor in the founding of our church was the tide of modernism from the 1920’s that saw the birth of Toronto Baptist Seminary, where J.R. Boyd was an early student before heading to Sudbury. Because there was already a Baptist congregation, but one whose commitment to evangelical truths was, shall we say, less than complete, “Sola Scriptura” would hardly have been taken for granted! It is doubtful that many Latin phrases were in use in a depression-era mining town, but it was not without reason that this cluster of believers named their new assembly “Berean”, highlighting their commitment to the searching of the Scriptures.

It is not 1936, or 1945 any longer. Strong, committed church goers of any type are rare. When I arrived in town about 17 years ago, there would have been I think 8 Catholic churches within probably a two-mile radius of our church, three United congregations, a couple of Anglican, and so on. Now those numbers would be 5, 1 and 1. Another near-by Baptist church closed recently. Of course, this means that one deals with fewer who are fatally flawed on their view of justification, and more who have no concern whatever about being right with God.

But this year’s emphasis on the Reformation has challenged me on my defensive indifference. Seeking to serve the Lord in an arid wasteland of indifference, immorality, and a more secular kind of idolatry proves what has always been true – that salvation is of the Lord. This is no time to let down our guard! What else do we have? Sola Scriptura is about the God Who Speaks, and it is so. If this be not true, we must pack up and go home.

For example, consider the nature of Christian ministry. In spite of the insights that might be drawn from the corporate world, or secular organizations, for leadership principles, Christian ministry is declared to be distinct by none other than the Lord Jesus Himself, most clearly in Mark 10:35-45. The way it is among the world, it will *not* be so amongst you! Jesus’ ministry generally, and giving Himself as a ransom specifically, forever defines the practice of the Church. 1 Peter 5:1-5 builds on that very point. It becomes obvious that Christian ministry – indeed, the very structure of the Church itself – becomes untenable without Sola Scriptura: if this doctrine be denied, then we will need something popish to keep it together!

It is for this reason that a consideration of the pastoral implications of Sola Scriptura almost inevitably brings us to 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5, where Paul’s masterful ability to meld doctrinal principle to practical living shines out on precisely our topic. As such, it is a defining text for the letters to Timothy and Titus, usually known collectively as the “Pastoral Letters”, demonstrating the dominating and defining role of the Word of God.

No doubt it is obvious by now that this paper is not going to spend any significant time on defining our terms; because of the emphasis of the year, I suspect no such definition is needed in this context, and even if it is, it is not hard to find. I chanced upon Rick Steves¹, European travel guru on PBS, giving a rundown on key sites of the Reformation explaining the role of the Bible in especially Luther’s work. Even if he came down on the side of praising the efforts at reunification in the present, he still presented the role of Scripture tolerably clearly.

¹*Luther and the Reformation*: aired on PBS WNED Monday, September 4, 2017, at 3 P.M. Steves is an active Lutheran. His documentary can be accessed on his web site, www.ricksteves.com.

But in the interests of completeness, W. Robert Godfrey's essay in *Sola Scriptura* draws links with a few themes that will prove important in our implications: first, he states the contrast: "As Protestants, we maintain that Scripture alone is our authority. Roman Catholics maintain that Scripture by itself is insufficient as the authority of the people of God". He clarifies that "I am not arguing that all truth is to be found in the Bible, or that the Bible is the only form in which the truth of God has come to His people. I am not arguing that every verse in the Bible is equally clear to every reader. Neither am I arguing that the church...is not of great value and help in understanding the Scriptures". And then this statement: "The Protestant position, and my position, is that all things *necessary* for salvation and concerning faith and life are taught in the Bible with enough clarity that the ordinary believer can find them there and understand".²

Notice the key words, "authority", "sufficiency", and "clarity": it is difficult to speak of "Scripture Alone" without also confirming its nature as God's Word. Others have also noted the related issue of canonicity, for we must have some understanding of what is actually Scripture.³

This paper will also not devote much time to the Reformation roots, except as examples to illustrate the implications. Using 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 as an outline, we think first of "Scripture Alone" in the making of a minister.

1. Sola Scriptura and the Making of the Minister: 2 Tim.3:14-15

I remember during the Clinton administration that the link between personal morality and ability to govern was being debated. Apparently there was a time when newsmen would overlook the personal indiscretions of politicians and other major public figures, but the cozy relations had changed between media and those they cover at least during Watergate. Many argued that modern leaders were subject to unfair scrutiny, and their personal morals should not interfere with the ability to do their job. Others, however, argued, not unreasonably, that legislators should have some sense of justice!

One hopes that such a debate would be quite short within the church! Surely the ability to serve the Lord and His people is directly connected to the personal holiness of the servant. It certainly is Paul's view in the Pastoral letters that character, reputation and actual conduct should all be considered in the selection of elders, and his own habit of urging the churches to follow his own example is pressed on Timothy and Titus.

For the present topic, 2 Tim.3:14-15 is the point: the making of a minister begins with the Scriptures that make wise to salvation. *Sola Scriptura* is said to deal with both authority and source, and in this case, the latter is the focus: heavenly things are not otherwise known than through Scripture, the only accurate source of our faith. Perhaps the role of the Word in the building of faith itself, as Paul would note in Romans 10:17, might deserve mention here as well.

Whenever I am assigned a presentation like this, I find myself wrestling with old rules of style. I am not sure they even apply anymore, but I was taught – in direct opposition to this sentence – not to use the first person. The author was to keep out of sight. But it is impossible not to notice how Paul inserts himself into his writings! We already alluded to Paul's melding of doctrine and practice, but he also infuses his writings with testimony and personal doxology. Although with doctrinal precision he explains the "Gospel of God" (Romans 1:1), he also does not hesitate to refer to "my Gospel" (Romans 16:25) – not, obviously, in the same way that it is God's Gospel, but in the sense of personal appropriation.

Thus the "pastoral" letters are all of 11 verses along before a word of personal testimony appears! He demonstrates that the saying, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" is clearly trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance because he himself received mercy.

Of course this addresses the making of a *Christian*, not specifically a minister, but that is the point: Christian ministers must be Christians first of all. A further reflection of this can be seen in 1 Timothy 4:16, where Timothy's double task is to take heed to himself and the doctrine: application of the Word must be personal before it is public. Any reasonable preparation for a life of ministry demands a commitment to the Word, and will acknowledge the debt we owe to grace.

Fee and Stott would see this point continuing through 3:16-17⁴: it is not just that the man of God would have responsibilities in the areas of teaching, including the correction of error, and in the believer's walk, including correction of ungodly practice, but that man of God himself must be "perfect". So how do we now tackle the nature of ministry itself, in light of *Sola Scriptura*?

²W. Robert Godfrey, "What Do We Mean By *Sola Scriptura*?" in *Sola Scriptura, the Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler, Reformation Trust (Ligonier), 2009, selected quotes from pages 1-2.

³See James White, *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority, and Authenticity*, Bethany House Publishers, 2004, chapter 5, "The Canon of Scripture Considered". (ebook 2012 edition consulted).

⁴See the commentaries listed in the bibliographic section at the end of the paper on the passages in question.

2. *Sola Scriptura* and the Making of the Ministry: 2 Tim.3:16-4:5

Paul outlines his understanding of Scripture: it is God-breathed. Inspiration is, of course, essential to *Sola Scriptura*: its unique position is rooted in its unique source, as we noted. But it is rare indeed for Paul to raise a doctrinal point without a practical purpose: in his mind, the two are intricately linked. In the case of his doctrine of Scripture, it is not a background concept, or a “first year” course never to be thought of again. It remains the beating heart of service, the *sine qua non* of the work of a Christian pastor. The ministry exists only because we have this astonishing resource.

Therefore the statement as the ESV has it reads, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...”, and is followed by a paragraph calling for its extensive and intensive use by the “man of God”⁵ whose calling is otherwise incomprehensible.

First, *Sola Scriptura* unties the paradox of Christian ministry. It was noted in the introduction above that distinctly Christian service is rooted in the service of Christ that underlies the paradoxical “greatest” being the “servant of all”, but that is only the beginning. Timothy is given a charge to command others, even though they will see his relative youth and perhaps despise his attempts to lead. Even a timid man is called to suffer for the Gospel. At the beginning of 2 Timothy 2, the teacher serves as a soldier of Jesus Christ — who, at the end of the chapter, must not be a fighter. While standing confident and unflinchingly defending his charge, he corrects those who need it with gentleness.

The Christian minister is called to humble authority. He must accomplish a profitable ministry while being entirely dependent on the Lord. He is a dying man promising eternal life. A servant leading the charge, and a sinner exemplifying godliness, there is not a pastor on the planet with his wits about himself who does not early and often say with Paul, “who is sufficient for these things?” Of course, the answer a few verses later (2 Corinthians 2:16; 3:5), “our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant” is our only hope.

Which is, of course, why *Sola Scriptura* is so vital! The work cannot be done, unless we have an authoritative, clear and effective Word from God. At least, the work cannot be done under the assigned parameters – which is why the denial of that doctrine, and the corrupting of authority and structure in the church, work hand in hand.

This is to say, secondly, that *Sola Scriptura* shapes Christian ministry: notice the list of tasks in 2 Tim.4:1-2 starting with preaching the Word: to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching” is not only a tall order, but entirely word-centred. The list of offices that the risen Christ gives to the church found in Ephesians 4:11-12⁶ similarly all revolve around the Word: apostles and prophets in the giving of it; evangelists in the proclamation of it; and pastors and teachers in the study and application of it to life.

No wonder that Paul saw the Word of God, the Gospel, as the charge given to him to keep – and the charge he is passing on to his proteges. These trustworthy sayings that all should accept need to be safeguarded, because the presence of teachers abandoning not only the Word but the character it requires for true ministry abounds in every age. Even Paul had his troubles with them!

Can it be argued that opposition to *Sola Scriptura* comes, not because someone has found a flaw with the teaching on any Biblical basis, but because we already have an alternative in mind? That alternative fundamentally changes the nature of ministry, and the church itself – which was exactly the argument of the Reformers. It has been suggested that one Catholic argument against Luther was that if the authority of the Pope was diminished, then anarchy in doctrine would break out. Their understanding of the nature of ministry demanded something other than *Sola Scriptura*. Tradition was required because that very tradition supported the structures of the church: it had not been built on the Scripture, and thus they could not accept the position. It was *practically* inoperable given the shape of ministry then in place.

So far, we have been speaking in fairly broad terms, seeking to demonstrate that Christian ministry as defined in the Bible cannot function without a belief in “Scripture alone” as our rule: we need that kind of absolute and definitive authority to drive and define our work. But now it is important to focus on some particular activities involved in ministry to explore how this affects the very tools we have at our disposal to carry out our charge.

⁵It is perhaps worth noting that some think “man of God” here is more likely the Christian generally, such as George Knight III in the NIGTC series. But since it does not exclude pastors – and others like Fee and Stott think that is the point in context – for our purposes we can leave it open.

⁶There is of course a link between the letters to Timothy and Ephesus, given that Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus to correct a number of errors that had arisen.

3. *Sola Scriptura* and the Means of Ministry: 2 Tim.3:16-17

I remember my dad's blue tool box. He had it before I was born, and had it till the day he died. Any time there was a repair to be done, out would come the box. It was not large, nor did it look impressive, but somehow whatever the task, he had the tools in there to do the job. When I bought my first car, my dad presented me with a red tool box as a starter set. Mine will never be quite as worn or well-used, given my general lack of handy-man skills, but the idea was that all the basics could fit in this box, and I would be equipped for every task.

Such is the Bible: the tool kit for ministry. Like my dad's blue box, when there is "good work" to be done, it contains what is needed. Given the context, and thus the burden of the Apostle writing to Timothy, there are broadly speaking two key functions of ministry for which he sees the Scripture as profitable. John Stott sees the four terms of 3:16 speaking to these two areas: first, the Word is profitable for teaching, and thus able to refute the error of those who would disagree; and second, the Word is profitable for instructing in righteous living, and thus able to correct the practice of those who stray⁷.

First, in the area of teaching, *Sola Scriptura* implies that the church is formed by the Word alone. If it is to be faithful to the plan of Christ, the Scripture must be central. We have already spoken of the role of Scripture to make us wise to salvation, but now we see that "salvation" is taken in the fullest sense of that completion in glory. It brings us to faith in Christ, and forms us into Christ-like worshipers. Ephesians 4:11-16 speaks of these offices of the Word, as we noted, but also underlines the dangerous headwinds faced by the Church. There are storms that will undo us, unless the profitable Word is flourishing in the hands of our teachers. Once again, only the God-breathed Scriptures are sufficient for the task, because only they have the necessary heavenly foundation to be any earthly good.

To that end, Paul sees himself as a man entrusted with the Gospel (1 Tim.1:11), and now, so is Timothy! 1 Timothy 4 is an important illustration and expansion on the summary statement in 2 Timothy 3. 1 Tim.4:6-10 effectively champions *Sola Scriptura* when it calls for good servants "trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine". In this letter, the ill-trained pretenders are never far from sight. It was in fact the first point made in the first letter that there are some teachers that need to be stopped right away (1 Tim.1:3)! They have no clue what they are talking about. Just because Paul refers to "irreverent, silly myths" in 4:7, do not think that he means to belittle the problem: the issues at hand are eternal ones (4:8-10).

It is fitting that the chapter ends with a passionate devotion to the task at hand, flooding the people with Scripture alone!

Guarding the deposit becomes almost a chorus, or at least a strong link among the pastoral letters (see 1 Tim.6:20; 2 Tim.1:13-14; 2:2; Titus 1:9). It is not a surprise in this light that one of the specific functions among the qualifications for elders that Paul gives is that they must be "apt to teach", and those who rule well in the teaching are worthy of double honour! This is the function we are to practice and to value.

The examples of the Reformers are instructive on this point. Critics argued that without a Pope, their reforms would disintegrate into in-fighting, and friends argued that a dependence on the Word sinking in was far too slow. Yet historians like Michael Reeves point out that lasting change comes only through the Word: they recognized that the only workable means of long-term reform would be saturation with the Word. Given the absence of the Word in any meaningful way in the church, this was a monumental task. About Luther, he writes, "He believed that the word of God must first convince people, and then the rotten old structures would collapse...it is the Scriptures that must drive and dictate thought and practice...He simply wanted to unleash the word of God, and let that do all the work." He then relates the efforts needed to reform church structures, congregational singing and the provision of preachers for other towns.⁸

Zwingli led council in Zurich to legislate biblical preaching only: "so Zwingli set about the creation of a school for preachers. The first stage was a grammar school for boys, to get them literate. After that, the next stage was a theological college.⁹ Calvin likewise "deliberately turned Geneva into an international centre for the propagation of the gospel", training and dispatching missionaries from the college and academy opened in 1559. "Starting with a general education and moving on to a detailed study of theology and books of the Bible, it equipped the pastors, who could then be dispatched, fully armed and trained, from Geneva."¹⁰

⁷ John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, p.103. "At all events, it is only by a diligent study of Scripture that the man of God may become 'complete, equipped for every good work'."

⁸ Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame*, pages 56-57

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.77. see also the discussion on page 86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pages 115-116.

Second, in the area of the practice of a godly life, it is not insignificant that we turn to several of the same texts that urged faithful teaching! That is in fact the point, neatly summarized in Titus 1:1, “knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness”.

Clarifying the truth in 1 Timothy 4:6-7 cannot be separated from training yourself in godliness. Teaching these things authoritatively means being an example in conduct, love, faith and purity also (1 Tim.4:11-12). Titus 2 underscores repeatedly that he is to teach the things that accord with sound doctrine – indeed, that adorn the very doctrine of God (2:1,10). Failure in the practice of godly living will cause outsiders to revile the Word, not just the believers (2:5).

As a third matter under the “means of ministry”, it is necessary to look at 2 Timothy 2:22-26, for *Sola Scriptura*’s impact is to direct attention away from the minister himself and towards the Word, and thus towards God Himself. The attitude of heart for the pastor is vitally important in Paul’s letters, with this text being a classic example.

Paul begins with basic godliness that needs to characterize all believers in 2:22: we call on the Lord from a pure heart, and nothing less is acceptable. Then he turns to the teaching that is under attack in 2:23, a context that will be expanded in the next chapter as well. But how do we go about this task? This is an amazing text, if it is remembered that Paul is under incredible pressure. Imprisoned for his faith, even some of his churches have apparently turned their backs on him. There are brief indications of loneliness and stress in this letter, and an impassioned plea for something to be done with those who are the worst offenders. And yet, kindness and gentleness remain the hallmark of patient ministry!

The servant of the Lord is not first of all interested in vindication: that can wait for glory. What he really wants more than anything is for his opponents to come to a knowledge of the truth. This is, as we noted earlier, part of what makes the Christian ministry startling in its requirements. And if we think that this brief summary overstates the case, a reading of 2 Corinthians will show in painful detail how Paul himself applied this. The meekness of Christ is on display.

This relates still to *Sola Scriptura*, because it is laying the foundation for the concentration of 2 Timothy 4:1-5 as the outflow of inspired and profitable Scriptures. I can be gentle, because it is the Word that brings its thunderous authority. It is not my church but that of Christ, and the fruit of this ministry rests with Him. I am more concerned about the people knowing the truth than I am about personal reputation. It is Scripture Alone that drives and directs.

Having said this, it is probably necessary to clarify that to confess Scripture Alone is to confess that it is God-given for a purpose: God-breathed, it is profitable for specific tasks that we are called to perform. But just as the Reformers differed greatly among themselves in the application of their shared principles, there are differences of opinion concerning the implications of *Sola Scriptura* in church life. While recognizing the danger of straying from our theme, the challenge it can present on a practical level is illustrated by the turn given to it by Rosaria Butterfield in her thrilling account of her conversion in *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. Her discussion is complex, and runs to several pages¹¹, making it all the more difficult to address here, but here are a few selected quotations in an attempt to present the core of her thought succinctly:

(Alluding to Brian Schwertley, *Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle of Worship*): *Schwertley’s point is this: The consequence of sola scriptura (the belief that the Bible is authoritative, complete, perfect, and sufficient) is a principle that regulates worship. This principle has the following components: proof texts from the Bible and a hermeneutic or a way of handling these proof texts.*¹²

*What principles about worship are derived from these verses? If we believe that God in his Bible teaches us how to live, then it is principally true that God also teaches us in his Bible how to worship him. Importantly, what regulates worship is a principle – and overarching idea – not a specific verse in the Bible... The Bible has been ‘canonized’. That means that certain texts by divine appointment have been admitted into a place of authority, which, by implication, means that other texts, while written and available, have not, by divine appointment, been given this authority.... God expects us to learn from life. The question then is this: should worship practices be derived from our experiences in life? Our tastes? Our cultural values? If we believe in sola scriptura, we have to say no. Worship is separate from life and worship standards must come from the Bible – that is, they must come from divine revelation and not from natural revelation.*¹³

(Her aim is to defend)...*a cappella psalm singing to the exclusion of all other music of praise... The literary principle that undergirds an understanding of the Regulative Principle of Worship is canon: the Bible is canonized. The literary principle that undergirds an understanding of exclusive psalmody is genre: the books of the Bible are organized as all books are under genre...if*

¹¹Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (expanded edition), Crown and Covenant Publications, 2014 pages 85-94.

¹²Ibid. p.90. The proof texts in question are Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 and Proverbs 30:6.

¹³Ibid. p.91.

*God gave us a book of praise songs, who are we to add to them? Bushell (in his book, Songs of Zion) points to exclusive psalmody as the logical consequence of sola scriptura.*¹⁴

In other words, the position is supported by the fact that only the Scripture is God-given for singing, therefore the purpose of God must be singing the Psalms only. Further, only the Word can direct our lives and purify our desires and our prayers, alluding to John 17:7-19. Themes learned through experience “may educate and inform, but only the word sanctifies and directs and discerns and convicts (Heb.4:12)”¹⁵. And besides, our worship is designed to please Jesus, and He sang the Psalms – and even more, He is the Word made flesh.

So here is an application of *Sola Scriptura* to ministry and practice in the life of the church. Since neither the Regulative Principle nor music in the church is the topic of this paper, the only issue before us is the use of *Sola Scriptura* to justify the practice proposed. The Reformers themselves did not interpret their views of Scripture alone to mean that their bookshelves should be emptied of all books but the Bible, but rather that the Bible would judge every book on their shelves. They did not deny the value of tradition and Church Counsels, but they denied that they were on par with Scripture in terms of inerrancy and authority. Scripture alone could be the rule by which all other possible sources of knowledge and understanding would be judged.

The missing piece in the argument for exclusive psalmody in light of *Sola Scriptura* is any purpose statement in Scripture itself that supports it. Scripture alone means that the Scriptural principles indeed direct our worship; it does not mean that Scripture alone contains or provides our worship songs. Apart from the rather questionable statement, “Worship is separate from life” in light of Romans 12:1-2, this would draw a boundary around singing only – I assume prayers are not exclusively the words of Scripture. Surely sermons are not. How does Scripture intend to be used? That there appear to be hymns outside of the book of Psalms, that are not drawn from the Psalms, seems to put the implied principle approach on shaky ground, not to mention Ephesians 5:18-21 and similar texts. For *Sola Scriptura* to mean anything, it must mean that the Bible is used as it is intended to be used. So the flaw in positions like that expressed by Butterfield is that the Bible nowhere presents itself as containing all the hymnody allowed in the Church. Obviously the Psalms are on a different level than the contributions of Newton or Watts, but can it be said that the contributions of such hymnwriters are excluded by the Word? Or is it rather that *Sola Scriptura* means that all hymns are to be brought to the bar of the Word of God?

What we are called to do is to use the Scriptures to govern our practice. What is evangelism, except the proclamation of the Word? It is through preaching, primarily – at least in its broadest description, that will allow for the range of words used in Acts¹⁶ including disputing and proving. What is worship and song, other than our response to the Word? The building of Word-centred, Gospel-centred churches and missions is the goal. If we do not hold to Scripture alone, we will not preach Scripture alone.

There are many further challenges, of course, as witnessed by attempts to be “Biblical” in counseling. Scripture alone means that it alone is the authoritative measure of all that we do. It is the source of all that we hold. That which upon careful examination contradicts Scripture must itself be contradicted.

Scripture’s sufficiency to meet the task is expressed passionately, and in the face of suffering, in Psalm 119. Once again, it is not possible to flesh this out, but seeing the Word at work is important. One of the important lessons of the Psalm is to learn that even though it says so much about the Bible, it is really about knowing God, for which the Bible alone is sufficient. Love for the Word of God is never a literary love, or scholarly one: it is love for the Lord, with the Bible the only way to draw and stay near¹⁷.

To return, then, to the Pastoral letters, we are reminded that Paul’s words about the Scriptures, and the role of teaching in the Church, is rooted in the challenges facing followers of Christ in this age. There are the challenges of insiders who are corrupt and corrupting; the old habits of the heart that die hard in us all; the rampant ungodliness of the world that despises everything we stand for; and the open persecution that we inevitably face, and of course Timothy’s own weaknesses, and the “spirit of fear” Paul seemed to fear would undo him. *Sola Scriptura* provides our refuge and courage to go on, as we underline in this final point.

¹⁴Ibid., p.92.

¹⁵Ibid.p.93.

¹⁶See for example, Eric Wright lists 23 terms to describe apostolic communication in Acts. Appendix 2, pages 141-144 in *Tell The World*, Evangelical Press, 1981.

¹⁷See my attempt to develop this theme in “The Bible – A Book for the Real World” in *Barnabas*, vol.9, no. 1-2.

4. *Sola Scriptura* and the might of ministry

The excellent treatments of our theme at the recent *Canadian Carey Family Conference*¹⁸ underlined that this is a most significant teaching of the Scriptures about the Scriptures, of great practical use for Christians in the midst of an ungodly and skeptical age. This of course is magnified among those whose calling it is to expound those very Scriptures, given that most modern structures and institutions see that as the most irrelevant of tasks. Even Christians are inclined to wonder if there is now a need to rely on something other than the Bible¹⁹.

But we are apt to lose sight of the purpose of God to bring glory to Himself. It has always been His way of working that human beings are employed as instruments, but in such a way that it is obvious to all that He alone has done it. The plagues that drove Israel almost to despair were designed so that not only Egypt but Israel herself would know that the Lord is God. Gideon's army was far too large: it might be concluded that he was a spectacular tactician rather than that he had an astounding God.

In like manner, 2 Corinthians 4:3-7 makes this point clearly about ministry. If ever we can point to our methods, our brilliant additions to Scripture, as the reasons for our success, we can be quite sure we are off-base. In what way Paul and his associates were but "jars of clay" is a key point in this letter culminating in that grand declaration of grace in 12:10 that when I am weak, then I am strong. As we noted earlier from 2 Corinthians 2-3, this, too, is in a context of sufficiency of God.

So if we could before state that the very nature of Christian ministry requires belief in this doctrine, or we must alter Christian ministry, now we can see the reason for it: for the glory of God alone.

This has an important corollary, as Isaiah 55 demonstrates: that the Word accomplishes the purpose for which God sent it. The prophet Amos showed that this could even mean a famine of the Word itself (Amos 8:11-12)! Whether we agree or object, Scripture alone is able to bring salvation and open eyes; if the Lord decree a famine of the Word, it is an act of horrifying judgment.

Stopping short of this judgment, Jesus' "parable of the sower" taught His disciples to be prepared for varied responses to that Word. It does what God wants it to do, not what we want it to do. But this preparation is designed to prevent our weakening on *Sola Scriptura*: we must redefine success according to the will of God, and not thereby conclude that the Word is somehow insufficient, in need of supplement.

If it is powerful transformation for which we labour, starting with that most radical step of regeneration, remember that we are born again by the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). But when Romans 12:1-2 links our transformation with the renewing of our minds, surely the role of the Word in the hands of the Spirit is implied²⁰.

But this is the source of our perseverance in ministry, as challenging as these truths might be. There is great comfort to be found in knowing that we are thoroughly equipped for every good work because the God-breathed Scriptures are in our hands. The issue of authority has not died out in the last 500 years! Undertaking the call of 2 Timothy 4:1-2 will surely elicit the question, "Who do you think you are?" and I suspect that apart from *Sola Scriptura*, that is a decidedly legitimate inquiry! This was Paul's concern in 2 Corinthians 2: we deal in eternal issues; how can we urge people to let go of their religious supports and trust Christ alone? How can we urge our young people to prepare for a life in opposition to the secularism of our age, knowing that they will face a far more violent and antagonistic world than we ever did?

Paul's burden in the Pastoral letters is for perseverance. Michael Reeves' conclusions in *The Unquenchable Flame* are interesting, especially in light of the tendency to see the Reformation as a step in the progress of humanity²¹. Reeves argues that, even if the Reformation unleashed forces of anti-authoritarianism and freedom in all its forms, that was not at all what it was about: rather, the Reformers aimed to go *back* to the original Gospel; they were in a sense against the "progress" of Rome. Inevitably, the true Christian minister must stand in their shoes – or perhaps better, true to the call of the great prophets like Isaiah 8:20 and Jeremiah 6:16, return to the "old paths". *Sola Scriptura* gives authority to Christian ministry, but also grounding and unchanging focus. Although "in season, out of season" may be debated as to whether it means Timothy or the

¹⁸ www.careyconference.net. See the presentations by Pastors Stephen Kring and Carl Muller on both *Sola Scriptura* and its implications for the nature of Scripture, and the Power of the Word of God based on Isaiah 55.

¹⁹ See the most interesting blog posting by Dr. Mohler, September 26, 2016, *For The Bible Tells Me So: Biblical Authority Denied...Against*, taking Pastor Andy Stanley to task for precisely this kind of thinking, where Stanley argued in a message that for apologetic reasons, we must give more than "The Bible tells me so". Mohler argued this is exactly the kind of apologetic motive that drove theological liberalism more than a century ago, and thus we can see where it leads. Search blogs at www.albertmohler.com for "Andy Stanley".

²⁰ See "The Transforming Power of Scripture", Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning in *Sola Scriptura*, ed. Don Kistler, p.112ff.

²¹ In fact, that is the grand conclusion of Rick Steves' documentary on Luther and Reformation alluded to earlier.

audience, it nonetheless relates to this point by assuring us there is no time when the Word is not needed, and no time when it is not useful: so the call to “preach the Word” echoes in our ears.

Peter once urged those whose service involves speaking to speak “as one who speaks oracles of God...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11). How one would do that without God-breathed Scripture is unfathomable; and surely it demands *Sola Scriptura* if that is our calling! We are not to speak as one who opines on the issues of the day, or scratches itchy ears with words of peace when there is no peace. We are to speak in such a way that God would be glorified. This is confirmed by Peter’s further words on Paul’s teaching (2 Peter 3:15): if that teaching is Scripture, then it will be transforming – and those who distort that teaching do so to their own destruction²².

Concluding Thoughts: On Being Thoroughly Equipped

At the Pastors’ Conference last spring, Principal Kirk Wellum made a passing reference to the instruction of Paul to read Scripture in our services²³. Surely this is important: making it clear that Scripture is accessible and obviously central to our churches is so basic, it is easy to overlook!

In the same vein, I read with great enjoyment Motyer’s little book *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Loving the Old Testament*²⁴. His passion for the Word easily came through the pages, and at the same time made me wonder how I could more effectively stir up such passion in our people. As I noted at the beginning of this paper, I am blessed with a congregation that really does love the Word, but such forces are at work to weaken its standing even in the church that we need such “guides” to loving the Bible more!

It is also important to make clear that the Bible is our only rule of faith and practice. Harold L. Busséll wrote of the subtlety of these temptations in his book *Unholy Devotion: Why Cults Lure Christians*. One chapter was titled “You Just Have To Hear Our Pastor!”. The author’s thesis was that most converts to “cults” came from the ranks of evangelical Christians because we carelessly fell into the kind of thinking that lends itself to it. This thinking is precisely not doctrinal but based on the person. We need to make it clear that pastors are servants, instruments in the hands of God: what you need to hear is the Word! *Sola Scriptura* should be a defense on such personality-driven churches, and make each member centred on God.²⁵

Beeke and Lanning give five questions preachers must ask: am I truly preaching the Word? Am I preaching the whole counsel of God? Am I doing so with clarity and passion? Am I preaching it experimentally as well as doctrinally? And then on this point of passion, does the manner of my preaching and my entire ministry confirm the message I proclaim? a warning against such a casual manner that it hardly conveys that I have something important to say.²⁶

Sola Scriptura inevitably means that it is what Christians need to hear. In Motyer’s book just mentioned, he notes the most interesting fact that the risen Jesus Himself in Luke 24 explained His own mission *by teaching the Old Testament!* Jesus uses the Word to preach Christ!²⁷

Margaret Clarkson, a hymnwriter who endured much suffering, wrote of the importance of the Word in the life of one who suffers in *Grace Grows Best in Winter*. “By Hearing” focuses on Romans 10:17 as the answer to the question, where to find the kind of faith “deep enough to hush our fears”. She writes,

There is only one answer. Paul gives it in Romans 10:17: “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”. If we would find the faith that will enable us to live triumphantly within our sharp-thorned hedges, we must find it in or from the Word of God.

But, she notes, many who suffer daily pain can hardly take in much Scripture. So fragments of the Word must be taken in, so vital is it to our faith, by whatever means we can. She continues:

²²So D. Moo, NIVAC on 2 Peter, pp.216-218.

²³Grace Pastors’ Fellowship Pastors’ Conference June 7, 2017. See also 1 Timothy 4:11-12.

²⁴Christian Focus, 2015.

²⁵Harold L. Busséll, *Unholy Devotion*, Zondervan, 1983.

²⁶“The Transforming Power of Scripture”, Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning in *Sola Scriptura*, ed. Don Kistler, pages 123-128.

²⁷Motyer, *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to Loving the Old Testament*, pages 17-18

There are no graduates in the school of human pain. As long as we must live hedged-in lives, we will be prone to fluctuation in our faith and our ability to endure. All too often we will be faced with the necessity of relearning faith's lessons and of remaking our commitments and renewing our vows. Truths of Scripture that we thought we knew not only by heart but by experience will have to be reapplied to our souls to meet our daily need.

And then by way of practical application, she writes,

Need I say that 'in sunshine weather' we must be diligent in our study of the Word and do everything possible to hide it in our hearts so that the Spirit will have bread to break to us in especially difficult times? ²⁸

That, it seems to me, is the attitude of one who believes in *Sola Scriptura*. I hunger for all the Bible I can handle. I will store up as much learning and will memorize as much as possible when I am able, because I know that nothing but Scripture in the hand of the Spirit will do when trial comes and need arises. Nothing replaces the Word for building faith!

Although obviously there is much more to be said, for now we conclude with 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14. The Church is called to make wide-ranging, diverse and appropriate application of the Word. As Stott puts it when commenting on 2 Timothy 4:2, "God's word is 'profitable' for a variety of ministries, as Paul has already stated (3:16). It speaks to different men in different situations. The preacher must remember this and be skilful in his use of it."²⁹ It is a rich resource that supplies admonition, exhortation, encouragement; those who use it well should be esteemed for that work! May God so equip us through His Word that it becomes profitable to all who hear us – so profitable that we will never think of turning anywhere else, for we will never exhaust its usefulness.

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²⁸E. Margaret Clarkson, *Grace Grows Best In Winter*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985, pages 25-29.

²⁹Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy*, IVP, Downers' Grove 1973, p.107.

Sovereign Grace Pastors' Fellowship

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***Sola Scriptura* and Pastoral Ministry**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Presented by Pastor Brad Powers, Berean Baptist Church, Sudbury

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