

Sola Scriptura
October 29, 2006
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This is “Reformation Sunday” commemorating the day in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in Germany.

But to the point of today’s sermon, it was four years later that Luther stood before the bishops of the church and the princes of the government and was interrogated for his teaching and preaching.

In that moment, with solemn consideration of the consequences his next words would bring, he declared that his conscience was captive to the Word of God.

He said, “I am overcome by the Scripture texts (by which I have been led), and my conscience is bound by God's Word.”

“My conscience is bound by **God's Word**.”

The Bible alone is the final word in the issue of my relationship with God and stands over every realm of human knowledge and endeavor.

What others may say, what church councils may dictate, what can be imagined in the heart of men must all stand under the light of the final arbiter of truth; the Word of God.

This alone (the Bible) is God’s word to us today.

This is how we know God and how we know his will for our lives today and for eternity.

The past two Sundays we have spent thinking about 1 Peter 1:22-2:3.

I have been captivated by the emphasis on the Word of God in these verses – especially the way he writes it in verse 23-25.

1 Peter 1:23-25 “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and

the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you.”

A mere 40 years after Luther's testimony, believers met in the Netherlands and declared: “We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein.” 1561 Belgic Confession, Article 7

A hundred years later in England the church wrote, “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...” 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 1, VI

But within 200 years that confidence in the Bible alone began to wane even among some Christians.

And by the mid-1900s many Christian leaders were questioning the accuracy and authority of the Bible.

Case Western Reserve University sent a questionnaire to 10,000 clergymen in five major U.S. denominations.

It received a reply from over 7400 of them.

The question asked was this: Do you believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God?”

They were not even asked if they believe it is without error; they were simply asked if they believe the Bible to be the Word of God in some unique way.

82% of Methodist ministers said “no.”

89% of Episcopalian ministers said “no.”

81% of United Presbyterians said “no.”

57% of Lutherans and Baptists said “no.”

(James Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter* (ICBI Foundation Series 1), 1979)

With an affirmation of the Bible as **the** Word of God slowly slipping from prominence, 200 evangelicals gathered in Chicago in 1978 and again declared their belief:

“Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine

authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

This year, our own denomination, the Evangelical Free Church of America reaffirmed our commitment to the origin and authority of the Bible.

“We believe that God has spoken through the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments. They are the verbally inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority that stands over every realm of human knowledge and endeavor. Therefore, the Bible is to be believed in all that it affirms, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.”

2006 EFCA Draft 2 Statement of Faith

What does all of this mean to you?

Oh, I realize full well that it is entirely possible to go through many days of life with nary a thought of God.

We don't sense any need for the Bible in order to set our alarm clock, make our coffee, drive our car to work or school, manage our business throughout the day or determine how we will use our free time.

There doesn't seem to be any obvious or compelling reason to search the Scriptures to make decisions about which job to take, which house or car to buy, which school to attend, who to date or marry, or which vacation to take.

One man wrote, “Life today on the outside is polished and orderly, like the fadeless nylon, super-smooth plastic, medicated, antiseptic, expedited and wall-to-wall carpet world we move around in, **but on the inside** it is broken, confused, hellish, anguished, lying in pieces and crying its eyes out.” (John Killinger, *The Centrality of Preaching / the Total Task of the Ministry*, 1969, 25)

Yes, we can function for a season without God's Word, but can we truly live?

I'm not talking about those who deny God altogether, I'm talking about us.

You believe in God. How do you know him?

- Does God love you?
- Is God truly sovereign over the affairs of this world and your life?
- Is he in control of what's happening or are you on your own?
- You believe in God the Son, Jesus. Why?
- Does he love you and did he die for you?
- Do you believe he forgives your sins?
- Do you believe there is a hell to avoid and a heaven to gain?
- Do you believe in God the Spirit who lives in you and guides you?
- Do you believe God has anything to say about how we live our lives for his glory and our good?

If you believe any of those things, how do you know them to be true?
In your most serious moments when you reach out to God, how do you know he is there?

In your pleading prayers, how do you know he hears?

Since the dawn of civilization, men and women have believed there is a god out there.

Life itself, the world on which we live, and the universe around it, demand an explanation.

And the explanation given throughout human history has been God.

The current issue of TIME magazine indicates that less than 5% of Americans believe the material universe is all there is
(October 23, 2006).

All humanity is, as Thomas Edison said it, "incurably religious" and, nearly all have some idea of God at the center of their religion.

But how do we know him?

The very presence of life and the universe around us only tell us that God is there and that he must be very powerful. (Romans 1:18-20)

But for most of human history that knowledge has not brought comfort but only fear to the hearts of people.

And nearly every religion is an attempt to placate a god they don't even know.

Yes, the heavens declare the presence, power and even glory of God (Psalm 19:1) but they don't let me hear from **him**.

Has **God** spoken? Can I hear from **him**?

If the answer is yes, do you realize again the implications?

If GOD has spoken, if God HAS SPOKEN, how can we not listen!

This Bible claims to be that WORD OF GOD to us!

I didn't say the Bible claims to be the Bible.

I said the Bible claims to be the WORD OF GOD – God's written revelation of **himself** to us.

2 Timothy 3:16 “All **Scripture is God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

When we say “God-breathed, inspired,” we **don't mean** as with Handel when he wrote “The Messiah” or Martin Luther King when he delivered his “I have a Dream” speech.

We mean that God breathed out his very own words to us by his Spirit superintending the human authors.

2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men **spoke from God** as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

413 times in the OT it declares, “Thus **saith** the Lord” or in more modern English, “The **LORD SAYS!**”

The New Testament writers, including the Apostles Paul and Peter, declared: Colossians 1:25 “I have become (the church's) servant by the commission God gave me to present to you **the word of God** in its fullness.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13 “When you received **the word of God**, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, **the word of God**...”

Or as we saw earlier in 1 Peter 1:23 “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring **word of God**.”

**But that begs the question that I want to address today:
How can I be certain that this Bible is in fact GOD’S
word to us?**

Just a minute ago I said that the Bible claims to be the Word of God. I quickly realize that just because a book claims to be from God doesn’t make it necessarily so.

Many books claim divine origin.

- Did not Mohammad claim divine origin for the Koran?
- Did not Joseph Smith claim the same for The Book of Mormon?

I also realize that I can’t use the Word of God to prove the Word of God – that is a circular argument.

It would be saying I believe the Bible is **the Word of God** because it claims to be and I believe the **Bible** because the Bible is the Word of God.

For most of us that kind of thinking doesn’t satisfy.

Instead, I am asking you, you who are Christians, especially you who love the Word of God, to do something you have a hard time doing.

I’m asking you to think of the Bible not as a holy book, as the Word of God, but to think of it merely as a book.

Now I want you to put that mere human book on the shelf with the works of Flavius Josephus, the **first century** historian who wrote extensively about Judaism and the history surrounding it.

I want you to put it next to Julius Caesar’s Commentaries on War written just a little earlier than Josephus.

These books are nearly contemporary with the NT books.

Next I want you to apply the same tests of authenticity and accuracy to all three works – Josephus, Caesar’s and to those books of Moses, David, Nehemiah, John, Peter and Paul, books of the Old and New Testaments.

The question being answered is this: Are these books reliable and trustworthy documents of actual history?

Three tests are often applied to works of antiquity:

First of all do they claim to be true to history?

If they make no claim to historical accuracy or if they in fact admit to being fiction, there is no point in testing them for authenticity and accuracy.

Secondly, is there internal evidence in each one to reasonably assume each is an accurate representation of what happened?

- If we could demonstrate that any one of them is filled with errors of historical fact,
- If we could demonstrate that any one of them is filled with self-contradictions,
- If we had multiple copies of any one of them that disagreed with each other in significant ways,
we could seriously question the accuracy of the book.

But in fact the history of the books of the Old and New Testaments stands up to every test of accuracy and authenticity better than any other work of antiquity.

Not one reference to geography, history, or people of the Bible has ever been demonstrated to be inaccurate.

More importantly most of the charges of inaccuracy in the Bible have been proven to be false charges, charges based on insufficient archeological or historical information.

As historians and archeologists continue to discover more and more, they continue to corroborate the accuracy of the books of the Bible.

Thirdly, can we be reasonably certain that the copies we read today are what were actually written by the authors 2000 or more years ago?

Consider this, for no other document from antiquity do we have as much confirmation that we are reading what was originally written as we do of the books of the Bible.

Few people question that we have an accurate representation of what Plato wrote or of what Sophocles wrote.

And yet we have no copies of Plato's work closer than 1300 years after he wrote it.

And the same is true for most of the works of antiquity which most people take at face value as true.

But we have many copies of the books of the Old Testament that date back to before the time of Jesus.

And we have even more copies of the NT books that date back to within 100 years of their being written.

Frederic Kenyon, former director and principle librarian of the British Museum wrote, "Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

(In Lutzer, 77)

Now please remember, we are not thinking of the Bible as the Word of God but simply as an ancient book of history, philosophy and song.

When we do that, does the Bible meet the tests of authenticity, integrity and accuracy?

The answer is a resounding "yes," in fact it is able to meet those tests better than any other book from the ancient past.

We can reasonably conclude that what these books claim happened did indeed happen.

The next logical question is, "Do these reliable historical documents give sufficient reason to believe that Jesus is who he claimed to be?"

You believe that Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan lived, not because some divine book says so but because reliable historical documents make the case for their existence.

- These OT and NT documents present Jesus as God the Son in human flesh.
- They claim he fulfilled ancient prophecies.
- They claim he performed miracles.
- They claim he died and rose again substantiating his claim to being God.

Now, unless you determine ahead of time that miracles can't happen and that resurrection is impossible, the evidence of these otherwise authentic, reliable and accurate books is that Jesus is who he claimed to be.

These historically reliable books claim that Jesus is God.

The next logical step is easy.

If Jesus is who he claimed to be (God in human flesh) then **he** is an infallible authority – what **he** says we can believe.

I like to say it this way. Since Jesus demonstrated that he is God by his life, death and resurrection, I would be a fool of the highest order to not believe him.

Jesus is the ultimate authority and to be believed.

The next logical step is equally easy: Jesus, with his unique and infallible authority says that these books of the Bible are in fact the very Word of God.

Throughout the NT Jesus claims divine authority for the Bible.

He treats it and quotes it as **God's** Word to humanity.

That Word is the final appeal he makes to clinch his arguments.

The point is that if the resurrected, ultimate authority, Jesus says this is the Word of God-it must be true!

Many years ago Martin Kahler summarized this argument well:

“We do not believe in Christ because we believe in the Bible, but we believe in the Bible because we believe in Christ.” (in Sproul, *Scripture Alone*, 86)

The fifth step is this: If these books of the Bible are the Word of God, as Jesus says, then they must, by definition, be entirely trustworthy – after all they are God’s Word.

And the conclusion is that because of the authoritative, infallible testimony of Jesus, we believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

Now, if I didn’t lose you “in the weeds,” you can understand that this is not circular reasoning.

- We started not by saying the Bible is the Word of God, but by simply saying the Bible is an historical document.
- Based on that reliable historical document we can reasonable conclude who Jesus is.
- Understanding and believing who Jesus is, we can trust him.
- He says the Bible is God’s Word.

That is how I know that the Bible is the Word of God and I can trust my life and eternity to its truth.

For those who believe otherwise, it is logically inconsistent to call the Bible “the good book” and not believe it is the very Word of God to us.

The authors of the Bible books clearly thought of themselves as God’s instruments to reveal God’s words to humanity.

So if the Bible is not God’s Word then they were either the most deceived or the most evil of authors – and the Bible could not be a “good” book.

That’s partly why we can’t be sanguine about other books and authors who claim to be speaking for God – either they are or they aren’t, and if they aren’t they are either deceived or evil.

But again what can we reasonably conclude?

Timothy 3:16 “All **Scripture is God-breathed** and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men **spoke from God** as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And so, again, what is all of that to us?

Earlier I asked, “Has God spoken? Can I hear from **him**?”

If the answer is yes, do you realize again the implications?

If GOD has spoken, if God HAS SPOKEN, how can we not listen!

I cannot say it more strongly than to say your life depends on this book!

Hear Moses: Deuteronomy 32:46-47 “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ They are not just idle words for you--they are your life.”

Hear the Psalmist: Psalm 19:10 “They (God’s Words) are more precious than gold,
 than much pure gold;
 they are sweeter than honey,
 than honey from the comb.”

Hear Jesus in Matthew 4:4 “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

God’s Word; hear it, read it if you can read and listen to it if you can’t, study it, and hear it taught and preached.

Talk about it with those who, like you, care what it says.

Demand that your teachers teach the Bible, demand that your preachers preach the Bible.

When people come to church they don’t need to hear from Bill Gates, Dr. Phil or Stephen Spielberg (or Oprah), they need to hear from God.

I implore our Adult Community leaders and Small Group leaders – don't spend much of your precious time together with the people in good books about everything else under the sun; spend that precious time in the Word of God – because it is **God's Word** to us.

Apart from what **God** has said in his Word, the teacher or preacher has nothing to say that couldn't probably be said by countless others and probably said better.

We read of the OT preachers, Ezra 7:10 “Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.”

And it was Nehemiah who wrote, Nehemiah 8:8, the preachers “read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.”

Of Jesus we read, Luke 4:16 Jesus “stood up to read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah... Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began” to teach them.

May that be us in our public and private meetings!

Over one hundred years ago, Benjamin Warfield, the principle of the then evangelical Princeton Seminary said it well.

“Let it suffice to say that to an (absolutely fully) inspired Bible, humbly trusted as such, we actually, and as a matter of fact, owe all that has blessed our lives with hopes of immortality (with God), and with the present (fruit) of the love of God in Christ. This is not an exaggeration... (Never) let us forget that, in point of fact, it is to the Bible that we owe it that we know Christ and are found in him... We must not at any rate forget those nineteen Christian centuries which stretch between Christ and us... Even with the Bible, and all that had come from the Bible to form Christian lives and inform a Christian literature, after a millennium and a half the darkness had grown so deep that a Reformation was necessary if Christian truth was to persist, - a Luther was necessary, raised up by God to rediscover the

Bible and give it back to man. Suppose there had been no Bible for Luther to rediscover - and no Bible in the hearts of God's saints and in the pages of Christian literature, persisting through those darker ages to prepare a Luther to rediscover it? Though Christ had come into the world and had lived and died for us, might it not be to us...as though he had not been? Or, if some faint echo of a Son of God offering salvation to men could still be faintly heard...who could assure our doubting souls that it was not all a pleasant dream?

“Whatever might possibly have been had there been no Bible, it is actually to the Bible that you and I owe it that we have a Christ, - a Christ to love, to trust and to follow, a Christ (of history who is) the ground of our salvation, a Christ within us, the hope of glory. (B.B. Warfield, *The Church Doctrine of Inspiration*)

Two hundred years ago John Burton Sr. (1803) wrote a hymn that we sing today – a hymn that captures our hearts’ love for the Bible because it is God’s very word to us.

Holy Bible, book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine;
Mine to tell me whence I came;
Mine to teach me what I am;

Mine to chide me when I rove;
Mine to show a Savior’s love;
Mine thou art to guide and guard;
Mine to punish or reward;

Mine to comfort in distress,
Suffering in this wilderness;
Mine to show by living faith,
Man can triumph over death;

Mine to tell of joys to come,
And the rebel sinner's doom;
O thou holy book divine,
Precious treasure, thou art mine.

Original *Trinity Hymnal*, #674

Sources:

Irwin Lutzer, *You Can Trust the Bible*

Earl Radmacher, *Can We Trust the Bible?*

R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone*

From the 39 Articles 1571

VI. Of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for salvation.

Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite as necessary to salvation

In the name of holy Scripture, we do understand those Canonical books of the old and new Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

Belgic Confession 1618

“Article 5: The Authority of Scripture

We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical, for the regulating, founding, and establishing of our faith.

And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them-- not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God. For even the blind themselves are able to see that the things predicted in them do happen.

Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture

We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it. For since the entire manner of service which God requires of us is described in it at great length, no one-- even an apostle or an angel from heaven, as Paul says--² ought to teach other than what the Holy Scriptures have already taught us. For since it is forbidden to add to or subtract from the Word of God,³ this

plainly demonstrates that the teaching is perfect and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings-- no matter how holy their authors may have been-- equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of time or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God, for truth is above everything else.

For all human beings are liars by nature and more vain than vanity itself.

Therefore we reject with all our hearts everything that does not agree with this infallible rule, as we are taught to do by the apostles when they say, "Test the spirits to see if they are of God,"⁴ and also, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house."⁵ ² Gal. 1:8 ³ Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19 ⁴ 1 John 4:1 ⁵ 2 John 10

Westminster Confession 1646

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; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; 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; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased. All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

III. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of 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.

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.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture; 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.

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. 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; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the 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.