

Scripture Alone

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Prayer...*Lord Jesus, Living Word of God. By Your Holy Spirit, breathe into us the clarity we need to reflect on the significance of the Reformation and the accountability Your servants called the Church to. We want to remain faithful to Your Word and receive the wisdom of salvation that You have promised through it. Speak O Lord; we come to You now. In Christ's Name. Amen.*

In 16 days

we'll reach the 500th anniversary

of the Reformation.

500 years ago

an Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther

raised his voice and challenged what he was witnessing

in the church of his time.

On October 31, 1517,

He nailed his 95 Theses to the front door

of Castle Church in Wittenberg.

His 95 Theses were 95 points of debate

that he wanted to raise with his colleagues

in hopes that the Roman Catholic Church

would return to it's roots.

Those of us from Protestant denominations

might see Luther's actions as a victory;

the starting of something new;

breaking away from the corrupt.

But we should remind ourselves

that Martin Luther never wanted to start

a new stream of Christian thought.

What he wanted to do

was ask the hard questions

and call the Roman Catholic Church to self analysis.

To **...test the spirits to see**

whether they are from God.¹

I imagine Luther's actions

were similar to that of the Apostle Paul

who wrote to the churches of Asia Minor

calling them to repentance and turning away

from the false teaching that had invaded

their communities.

¹ 1 John 4:1, *ESV*.

Luther saw what was going on around him.

Some of the issues he saw were social:

Rich families paying the church more

to have a son (whether learned or not)

become a priest - the status of priest

was significant in that day, and buying

your way in meant you could bypass

being an example or

learning about the Bible.

Another issues was theological

particularly around the sale of *indulgences*.

You could buy a loved one's way out of purgatory into heaven

if you gave the church money.

The more you gave to the church,

the faster your loved ones would be released.

Luther saw this corruption

— this abuse of power —

and called for repentance.

Luther started this in Germany

but he was not alone in Europe.

Over in France we meet a reformer

by the name of John Calvin.

He, like Luther, had difficulties

between what he saw in Scripture

and what he witnessed in the Church around him.

John Calvin had a disciple

by the name of John Knox,

who took Calvin's teachings back to Scotland

and who began to Church of Scotland

which would later plant churches in Canada

known as the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

For those who have studied the Reformation

there are 5 main themes (5 *Sola's* = "Alone")

that are distinct to the Reformation:

1. Sola Scriptura ("Scripture alone")
2. Solus Christus ("Christ alone")
3. Sola Fide ("faith alone")
4. Soli Deo Gloria ("to the glory of God alone")

5. Sola Gratia (“grace alone”)

As we spend the next 5 weeks

reflecting on the Reformation

we’ll be looking at each of these *Sola’s*

and exploring **what they mean for us today.**

This morning we look at

Sola Scriptura...Scripture Alone.

The Reformers brought focus back to Scripture Alone

because at the time in the 1500s

the Roman Catholic Church placed its doctrinal authority

in three main areas:

sacred scripture

(in Latin, not a language many people spoke)

sacred tradition

(the teachings that had been handed down

through the Church from previous centuries)

the magisterium

(the authority of the Pope and bishops)

From these three areas

it doesn't take long to see that doctrinal authority
is held pretty tightly within the hierarchy of the church;
regular people didn't have a say.

The Reformers,

spoke out against this structuring
to say that true authority is found in **Scripture Alone**.

And so made it their mission to translate the Bible
from Latin to the language of the people.

They wanted the people

to have access to the Holy Scriptures
because the Scriptures alone have true authority.

To understand this, we turn our attention

to Paul's second letter to his youngest disciple, Timothy.

***But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have
become convinced of, because you know those from whom
you learned it...***

As Paul wraps up his second letter to Timothy

he finishes by encouraging him
to stand firm in everything he's learned about God

and about the Scriptures.

He knows he can trust what he's been taught

because he knows where he learned it from.

Earlier in 2 Timothy

we learn that Timothy learned the Scriptures

from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.²

Timothy could trust what he knows about God and the Scriptures

because he's seen it lived out in his grandmother and mother.

He knows what is written is true

because the two most influential people in his life

lived those truths everyday.

We can scream to our kids

that God is real and the Bible is true

till we're blue in the face,

but until they see us *living* it out everyday

our words will be useless.

Timothy saw God's truths lived out

and Paul encouraged him to continue living out those truths.

² c.f. 2 Timothy 1:5.

Paul writes,

...you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Now there's a lot in these three verses.

As we move forward we'll look at:

- the Purpose of Scripture
- the Authority of Scripture
- How to use Scripture

PURPOSEOFSCRIPTURE

In verse 15 we read

that the Holy Scriptures are **able to make you wise for salvation.**

The first question we need to ask

is what is meant by Holy Scriptures?

During Timothy's time,

the only Scriptures they had
were the books of the First Testament.

Some of you may notice that I say *First* rather than *Old*
and I do that intentionally.

Old might imply

outdated, not as important, not as relevant
but the truth is,

this was the Scripture that Paul, Peter and Timothy had.

They read the First Testament.

This is what they knew; this is what formed their theology.

They found that it brought wisdom
about salvation.

The First Testament

constantly points to God's Messiah
and that Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth.

What we now call the New Testament

was the Apostles fleshing out exactly how

they knew Jesus was that Messiah

and the implications of His teachings.

As we read Scripture more and more

we are strengthened in faith
believing that Jesus really is
the fulfillment of all God's promises
and the way of salvation.

AUTHORITYOFSCRIPTURE

As Paul continues

he explains the authority of Scripture

is in the fact that

All Scripture is God-breathed...²Timothy 3:16

The very breath that breathed life into humanity;³

the very breath that Jesus surrendered at his death;⁴

the very breath that Jesus created upon His disciples,⁵

this is the breath that inspired the Scriptures.

I love the way commentator Thomas Oden puts it:

³ Genesis 2:7

⁴ Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30

⁵ John 20:22

“As our breath is in our language and mixes with our words, so does the breath of the Spirit enter into the language of Scripture and enable its very words to be means of grace.”⁶

The authority of Scripture

is found in God’s active influence

in the composition of each word through His Holy Spirit

guiding individuals to make sense of God’s activity

in the world around them.

But, not only is God

actively involved in the composition,

His Holy Spirit is also involved

in the interpretation of those Scriptures.

Meaning, Scripture has authority today

because God’s Holy Spirit was active when they were written

and God’s Holy Spirit is active now

as we read each word,

seeking to answer the question:

⁶ Oden, Thomas C. *Interpretation: First & Second Timothy and Titus*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 25.

what does this mean for us today?

Apart from the Holy Spirit

the Bible is nothing more than history, poetry, narrative, hyperbole.

But the Holy Spirit is the *breath*

that helps these words come to life

and makes them transformative;

to plant these words into our being

and allow them to flourish

as God's Gospel grows within us,

renews us, transforms us;

deepening our faith in Christ and

our understanding of salvation

made possible in Him.

The authority of Scripture

isn't in a book;

it's in the very breath of God

that is the Holy Spirit of Christ.

USINGSCRIPTURE

Paul finishes off

by outlining what Scripture is useful for:

***...teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in
righteousness, so that the servant of God may be
thoroughly equipped for every good work.*** 2Tim 3:16-17

Of the four uses that Paul lists,

he uses **teaching** and **training** as outer brackets,

recognizing that the end goal is to teach and train us

in following God's ways.

Jesus told his disciples,

***...go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the
Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey
everything i have commanded you.*** Matthew 28:19-20

Throughout the Bible

we hear God outlining a particular way of living;

a way that resembles life under God's ruling;

the Kingdom of God.

Paul reminds Timothy

that all of Scripture **teaches and trains** us in this way of living.

A way that is constantly aware that a Holy God is in our midst

and we are taught and trained in

how we conduct ourselves in that reality.

And within those brackets,

there are moments when Scripture will

rebuke or **correct** us.

In regards to rebuking,

N.T. Wright comments,

"...as we read scripture it will from time to time inform us in no uncertain terms that something we've been doing is out of line with God's will."⁷

As we read Scripture,

the Holy Spirit often has a way

of causing the words to jump off the page at us.

Sometimes this is a subtle jumping;

other times it feels like a freight train has hit us.

The point of these moments

isn't for us to feel guilt or shame for our lack of obedience.

⁷ Wright, Tom. *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 121.

But it's a moment to practice repentance
and allow God to deepen our understanding of salvation
and our faith in Christ, through these written words.

The word **correction**

can also mean **restoration**.

Meaning, the point of using Scripture to *correct* someone
isn't a means of shaming them for their failures
but to restore them to an awareness of Christ
and to restore them as
a fellow brother or sister in Christ.

Much like the prophets

who longed for Israel to *restore/correct* their relationship with God
through repentance.

Scripture, used to **rebuke** or **correct**,

is never to be done from a top-down mentality.

Scripture outlines how God

rebuked and **corrected** His people:

by becoming human and dying on a cross.

We are to have the same mentality

when using Scripture in these ways.

Scripture is useful for

teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

All of these are necessary to **equip** God's People

for every good work.

MEANINGFORTODAY

So what does Scripture Alone

mean for us today?

I confess that I take for granted

how accessible the Bible is today.

We have at least 15 printed Bibles in our home,

and I can access to every digital translation available

on my computer or phone.

There are websites

that will email you a daily verse

so that you can wake up and have regular passages

waiting for you without having to do anything.

In the 1500's it was very expensive to buy a Bible.

Early on, copies were printed by hand.

As the printing press developed

it was easier to make more copies,

but even these were still more expensive

than what we'd pay for a Bible today.

We can access these sacred texts so easily

and yet how many of us struggle to read daily?

Or how many of us will only read one translation

when scholars have spent careers

researching, learning dead languages,

analyzing literary structures to prove

that some verses in the Bible

can actually be translated in

multiple ways?

Why wouldn't we want to invest time

in reading multiple translations to gain the bigger picture?

I say this not to shame us

or guilt us into believing

we need to do more.

What I hope we can learn from the Reformers

is that they had a *deep passion for the Bible.*

They had a deep yearning to know God

and they knew that reading the Bible

was the way to know God more.

They learned from Paul, that the Scriptures were **God-breathed;**

these were more than words - they contained life.

These words told them about God's **salvation**

and how God was going to bring about that **salvation.**

We now have the reflections of those

who encountered the Messiah

that was promised in the First Testament

who fulfilled the other promises God made.

These reflections have been added to the canon of

our Holy Scriptures in the Second Testament.

Every word points to **Jesus**, God's Messiah/Christ.

Scripture Alone is how we get to know the Messiah.

Scripture Alone is how we develop and nurture faith in Jesus.

Scripture Alone teaches and trains us in responding to Jesus'
call on our lives, and corrects us along the way
so that we don't miss a step.

This is more than religion.

This is more than a historical book, poetry book, or narrative book.

This is life....this is hope...this is *Sola Scriptura*.

Let's Pray...