

Sola Scriptura

October 29, 2017

On October 31, 1517, something big happened that no one big noticed, for that matter no one small did either. A little monk in a small backwater nailed a piece of paper on the door of a village church. No one noticed precisely because everyone nailed things on that door. It was the town bulletin board.

It could be that the little monk had to brush aside an announcement declaring an engagement, or the notice of a horse for sale, or sketch mocking someone. In anonymity, this monk affixed a broadsheet with the rousing title, ‘Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.’

Yikes. No wonder we know it as the 95 Theses. Not that it is catchy.

The irony was that if anyone would have noticed that broadsheet dancing in the breeze they would not be able to read it anyway. Most of the town and surrounding area was illiterate and on top of that—‘Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences,’ was written in Latin.

Luther was inviting a debate on the abuse of indulgences—at this point he still thought they were biblical—and he nailed this up on All Saints Eve, knowing that all the university officials would be at church the next day, celebrating All Saints Day on 11/1/1517.

He wanted to debate.

THAT debate never happened.

Instead, 10/31/1517 became the date that the fire of the Reformation was lit.

Over 100 years later, Richard Sibbes said of Luther, “God by him kindled that fire which all the world shall never be able to quench.”

The reason that this fire cannot be quenched and is still burning today is not because Luther was innovative and invented new theology. No, we celebrate the reformation because it was a rediscovery.

When the fire began to rage the Reformers understanding of the scripture matured—they were able to summarize the Reformation in the 5 Solas.

Those five are:

- Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)
- Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)
- Sola Fide (Faith Alone)
- Solus Christus (Christ Alone)
- Soli Deo Gloria (To the Glory of God Alone)

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. And we know this from scripture alone.

These are not teachings foreign to the scriptures, this is what the scriptures had always taught, but for so long no one was listening.

We celebrate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the rediscovery of the Bible. And in many ways the most important of the all the solas is sola scriptura. This doesn't mean that the reformers thought it was only right to read the Bible and nothing else.

No, they were saying the Bible is our authority.

Scripture alone has the ultimate authority because scripture alone is the Word of God.

This was a truth that was rediscovered in the Reformation that hiding in plain sight all the time. It was hiding in the Bible.

Why is the Bible Authoritative?

Why does it matter that the Bible is authoritative?

One of the many passages in the Bible that speak of the reason for the Bible's authority is 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

“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.” 2 Timothy 3:14-17

PRAY

1. Why is the Bible Authoritative?

Verse 16, gives us the answer straightaway—

“All Scripture is breathed out by God...”

One of the reasons I enjoy the ESV is because it is an essentially literal translation. Your translation might say ‘inspired’—that is not a good rendering. Artists, chefs, poets and writers get inspired and produce something good.

But scripture is different. It is literally breathed out by God. Paul is trying to describe where scripture comes from and none of the words he had at his disposal could communicate what the Bible is.

So, he made one up—‘breathed out by God’—that is one word in the original. Literally, God-breathed.

He doesn’t say that scripture is associated with God, or that it is given from God, or that it was directed by God

But breathed out by God.

The Bible is authoritative because it is breathed out by God.

This means that the Bible is much more than just true—it is the standard of truth.

This means the Bible is much more than just right—it is the standard of righteousness.

This means the Bible is much more than good—it is the standard of goodness.

This means the Bible is much more than important—it is the standard by which we measure what is important.

Why?

Because it is breathed out by God.

Breathed out by God stresses both that the scriptures came from God AND that God is a speaking God.

If God did not speak—we would not be able to figure out who he is by seeing nature. We would have a vague idea that all of this—especially mankind—could not have been an accident but nothing in creation tells us anything but that there had to be a creator.

The Bible introduces us to the creator—and we find that he speaks. The Bible's great purpose is to introduce us to God and inform us about ourselves. We find that God created all things and they were originally very good but then sin and death pillaged all things and destroyed all hope.

But we find out that God the son has come to be pillaged by sin and death (though he was sinless) so that we might trust him and escape death.

We would not know this without the Bible.

There is no book like this book. Did you know what is what Bible means? When you say, ‘The Bible’ you are saying, “The book.” There are many books, but this is THE book.

This book has the words of eternal life. Without this book we would have no idea that God cared one whit about us—but with this book we find he loves us more than we would ever dare to hope.

I could never believe he would love me and if he did I would think he would only barely love me. But that is not what the Bible says—God is love. And he loves me and all of you with an eternal, boundless, never fading, never failing, forever sure love.

Just as God breathed the breath of life in Adam when he created him in the garden—the Bible too carries the scent of his breath. This book does not animate bodies, but has the words of eternal life.

This book has the words of life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

If we didn’t have this book we know about this Jesus or his message and we would all perish and face eternal death.

Don’t imagine that this book just has its origin with God and is like any other book. No. This book is alive—it still breathes.

I'm not trying to be obtuse or vague but the writer to the Hebrews says,

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

The Bible is authoritative because it is alive with the Spirit of God. When you read it—God speaks. When a preacher preaches—God speaks.

All scripture is God-breathed—

You might say, “Hold on. Paul only had the OT—you can't pull a fast one and add the NT.”

Good question—

Two places we can say that the NT is on equal par with the OT—

“And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.” **2 Peter 3:15-16**

Peter regards Paul's letters as scripture just like the OT. Another spot is from 1 Timothy, in one of Paul's letters.

“For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” **1 Timothy 5:18**

Deuteronomy 25:4 (you shall not muzzle the ox when it treads out the grain)—I hope none of you do that!

Luke 10:7 (The laborer deserves his wages)

The NT is just as authoritative as the OT. So, when we say the Bible is authoritative we have in mind the 66 books from Genesis to Revelation 39 OT books & 27 NT books.

It is beyond the scope of this sermon to talk about how the canon was formed—hint, hint not like the Da Vinci Code—all those books were recognized as scripture in the 1st century.

The Bible is Authoritative. Herman Bavinck said,

“As the word of God, it stands on a level high above all human authority in state and society, science and art. Before it, all else must yield. For people must obey God rather than other people. All other [human] authority is restricted to its own circle and applies only to its own area. But the authority of Scripture extends to the whole person and over all humankind. It is above the intellect and the will, the heart and the conscience, and cannot be compared with any other authority. Its authority, being divine, is absolute. It is entitled to be believed and obeyed by everyone at all times. In majesty, it far transcends all other powers. But, in order to gain recognition and dominion, it asks for no one’s assistance. It does not need the strong arm of the government. It does not need the

support of the church and does not conscript anyone's sword and inquisition. It does not desire to rule by coercion and violence but seeks free and willing recognition. For that reason, it brings about its own recognition by the working of the Holy Spirit. Scripture guards its own authority." Herman Bavinck

You might think—that is a circular argument—the Bible says it is authoritative so it is authoritative?

Not likely.

It is a manner of circular reasoning, but it must be that way. For example—someone once said,

Without logic we would not be able to make an argument.
We are able to make an argument.
Therefore logic must be real.

Circular but legitimate.

Or I might say—how do you know that you are thinking right now—because I am thinking right now.

Circular but legitimate.

The Bible is authoritative because it is God's word and it tells us that it is authoritative and there is no higher authority to appeal to.

Sola Scriptura—

The scripture stakes a claim in your life—God speaks—are you listening?

You might think—what does it matter?

2. Why does it matter that the Bible is authoritative?

Who cares? So What?

It matters greatly. If this is not the word of God you can safely ignore all of it. You don't have to play games you don't have to make a show of talking about how Jesus was a good man, and had a lot of good things to say but—he was just a man.

You can safely ignore everything that this book says about mankind or the past or the future or anything at all.

You can sleep with who you want.

You can eat all you want.

You can drink whatever you want.

You can think only about yourself.

You can do whatever you want.

If the Bible is not authoritative it is safe to ignore it outright or treat like your copy of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls,' "I read that in high school, I'm good.'

But if it is the word of God it is unsafe to ignore it. You have the final word from God to mankind—how can we ignore a message like that?

What?

Would it be safe to ignore the Bible?

No.

Listen, you are going to build your life on something, make it the word of God. That is what Sola Scriptura means, it means that you can safely build your life upon the message of this book.

I'll give you an example from this week—

‘but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.’ Psalm 147:11

That little phrase ‘those who hope in his steadfast love.’ That jumped at me this week—I had to think—what does that mean?

Hope in his steadfast love?

After a while I realized—it is hoping in the fact that God loves me with a steadfast, enduring love. I can know that anything that happens to me is not because he has stopped loving me.

Oh no.

He has steadfast love. Love that I can hope in. A hope that is not empty but, strong, sure and enduring.

But,

If the Bible is just a book and not the book I have no confidence that the Lord will take pleasure in me or that I can hope in his steadfast love.

How do I know that he loves me, really? I don't. I should have no confidence in his steadfast love because I don't know that is real.

But we do know.

This is the only book you don't have to wonder about hidden agendas, half-truths, and here you can believe everything you read.

Nothing else in this life is like the word of God.

It is authoritative—that means not only should we feel safe building our lives on it—but we must build our lives on it. We dare not build our lives on anything else.

That is why when we gather on Sunday morning—which is the most important day of the week—that is why

We—

Sing the Bible
Read the Bible
Pray the Bible
Teach the Bible
Preach the Bible

There is no other foundation that we can safely building our lives on.

I wonder how many of us need a reformation when it comes to how we view the word of God. I'm talking to those in here who are Christians.

For most of the last 2000 years Christians did not have access to the Bible, and if they had it, they probably couldn't read it.

Does the Bible have authority in your life?
Do you let the Word speak in your life?

Are you dying to hear from God, but leave your Bible on the shelf?

Are you groaning for hope and, keep your Bible closed?
Are you bustling with indifference and leave for tomorrow the scriptures?

I think we all need something of a Reformation in our lives when it comes NOT to how we view the bible—but what role it plays in our lives.

Most of us in this room will agree that the Bible is authoritative—that it is inerrant, that it is the Word of God.

But do our lives show it?

Do we make decisions in light of the Word of God?

Do we regard others as the word tells us to?

Do we make time to read the Bible?

Do we trust in church traditions or the word of God?

Do we trust in what pastors say or the word of God?

Do we fight to read it?

I think one of the reasons that we have relegated the Bible to the side in our lives is because we have so many of them—they are everywhere. And we have easy access to the Word of God and somehow there seems like there will always be time tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow for reading.

The same is true for Sundays.

There is nothing more important to our health as Christians as to be addressed by God through the word in song, prayer, reading, preaching Sunday by Sunday.

The people of God gathered with the presence of God addressed by God through his word.

Amos prophesied to an indifferent people—

[11] “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD,

“when I will send a famine on the land—
not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,
but of hearing the words of the LORD.

[12] They shall wander from sea to sea,
and from north to east;

they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.” Amos 8:11-12

Those who repeatedly reject or neglect God's word may see a day that they can't hear it at all.

There is no more severe punishment than to be cut off from the voice of God.

Here is another reason that it matters that God's word is authoritative.

When I say authoritative—you might be thinking—well whatever it says I have to obey. Yes—but the Bible is not just or mainly a string of commands demanding obedience all the time.

Because the bible is authoritative—the way it comforts us is authoritative.

- When suffering bears down on you and you don't think you can take another breath—because everything is so difficult—And you recall:

“God is my refuge and strength a very present help in times of trouble.” Ps. 46

He does not merely offer strength he becomes our strength. Not only that—

“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. [18] For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Hebrews 2:17-18

He can help those who suffer. The Bible says this authoritatively. He can and does help us in ways that no one else can. He can help.

Because the Bible is authoritative—what it says about mankind is authoritative.

- All have sinned, but there is a sure way of escape.
- God became man and man can get to God.

Because the Bible is authoritative—what it says about my suffering is authoritative.

- My sorrow is not artificial, I can't wish it away, I can't drink it away, I can't pretend that it is not real—but I can know that my sorrow is limited. It does not last forever.

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” 1 Peter 5:10

Because the Bible is authoritative—what it says about my guilt is authoritative.

- Though I may feel guilty for real sins that I have committed, am committing and will commit in the future—my guilt seems like it will stick to me forever.

“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” Isaiah 43:25

Why should past sins take a toll on us—he remembers this no more. We needn't carry them around.

Because the Bible is authoritative—what it says about my future is authoritative.

- Everything wrong will one day be made right—everything good will one day come true.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:4

Because the Bible is authoritative—what it says about my sin is authoritative.

- You might wonder—maybe the troubles that are hitting me are hitting me because I deserve them. I am being punished.

“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. [11] For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; [12] as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:10-12

Because the Bible is authoritative—what it says about my faith is authoritative.

- You might wonder if you have enough faith, but scripture points us to God. The point is not our faith but our God, you always have enough God.

God speaks in and through the scriptures—are we listening?

Sola Scriptura is not a truth abstracted from life—this is where we live. God’s word, God’s voice, God’s breath for you.