

2 Timothy 3:10 - 17

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[0 : 00] On the thirty-first day of the tenth month of the year of our Lord, 1517, as the good citizens of Wittenberg went about their business, few could have suspected that the sound of a hammer striking on the door of their castle church would soon echo around Europe and the world and lead, ultimately, to the greatest transformation of Western society since the Apostles preached the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 Theses on the church door in Wittenberg provoked a debate that culminated in what we now know as the Protestant Reformation.

Now, two of the key issues that led to Luther's call for Reformation concerned the means by which a sinner could be found righteous in the sight of God, and very much related to that first concern, the primacy of the Bible over church tradition in giving an answer to that question or concern.

And in an attempt to capture the central theological planks of the Reformation, five Latin phrases were in time coined, the five solas. And the five solas can be found individually expressed in the various writings of the sixteenth-century Reformers, either explicitly or implicitly, but they're not presented in a list. It's likely that the list of five solas came about at a later date in an attempt to, I guess, present these truths in an easily recognizable and easily remembered way. Now, solas is the Latin word, or sola is the Latin word meaning alone or only. And the five solas are, and they're normally presented in Latin, though they're of easy translation, sola scriptura, and scripture alone, solus Christus, Christ alone, sola gracia, grace alone, sola fide, faith alone, and soli del gloria, to God, the glory alone. Now, we as believers, 500 years down the road, we have reason to be grateful to God for the bold and faithful stand taken by men and women like Luther five centuries ago. And one way of expressing our gratitude is to remember and learn from them and the truths that they rediscovered. I think it's important to stress that the truths that were fought over at the Reformation, it wasn't anything new. These were truths that were rediscovered. The Reformers, as one person has put it, they weren't innovators, they were excavators. They weren't inventing anything new, they were excavating in God's Word and discovering truths that had been put to one side or hidden in some measure. And we're going to do that, and we're going to begin this short series on the five solas with the first of them, sola scriptura.

You do sometimes find them in different order, but usually the order in which they're presented has sola scriptura as the first of the five. Also, by way almost of introduction, it's worth noting that the the five solas, though they can be applied more broadly, relate specifically to our understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Now, the Bible covers other ground, but the battleground, as it were, at the Reformation, very much centered around the doctrine of salvation, and the five solas do very specifically relate to that doctrine, though as I say it can be, or they can be more broadly applied. So, we are saved according to the way of salvation marked out in Scripture alone. We are saved by the atoning life and death and resurrection of Christ alone. We are saved by grace alone, by faith alone, and to the glory of God alone. Sola Scriptura. Let's begin there. Now, I don't want to give a lecture on this theme. That's not the purpose of our gathering this morning, but rather to preach a sermon from God's Word. And so, everything that I'm going to say, or certainly the bulk of what I'm going to say, will be drawn from this classic passage in the Bible, about the Bible, that we've read, read, namely 2 Timothy chapter 4, rather verse chapter 3, verses 14 to 17. And I want to draw out from the passage four truths about Scripture, about the Bible, found in this passage, but that also at the same time serve to illustrate, at least in some measure, what is meant by the motto, Sola Scriptura. And the four truths that we will note and develop a little from our text are as follows, the authority of

[5 : 37] Scripture, the scope of Scripture, the clarity of Scripture, and the purpose of Scripture. Certainly, these are truths concerning the Bible that we find in this passage. I'm not claiming that this is a kind of exhaustive presentation of all that could be said around the theme of the Bible, or

even to explain the motto, Sola Scriptura, but these are elements of it, and certainly they're elements found in our passage. And we'll give most attention, or certainly we'll spend more time, of the four that I've mentioned, on the first of them, the authority of Scripture. And of course, the matter of authority was at the heart of the Reformation struggle. Who or what could provide an authoritative answer to the question that Martin Luther was tortured by? How can I be right with God? How can a sinner be friends with God?

How can a sinner be reconciled to God? This was his great concern, and it is what led him to where he was led in discovering an answer to that question. The Church of Rome, of which Luther, of course, was a part, and Luther himself agreed that the voice that needed to be heard to answer that big question was the voice of God. Luther and the Church, of which he formed a part, acknowledged that it was God's voice that it was God's voice that needed to be heard. But the question was, where could a man or a woman hear God's voice? Now, the Church argued that the Word of God flowed along three, as it were, merging streams, the Bible, church tradition, and the magisterium, or the teaching function of the Church really embodied in the person of the Pope. Luther, in contrast, argued that God's voice could be heard in Scripture alone, hence sola scriptura. Scripture alone, argued Luther, is the Word of God, and because it is the Word of God, it enjoys that unrivaled authority. Well, let's turn to our text, to the passage that we've read, and see what we can discover there on this matter of the authority of the Scriptures grounded in their authorship. Paul, here in the passage that we've read, identifies in very vivid language the identity of the author of the Scriptures. There in verse 60, these very well-known words. All Scripture is God-breathed. All Scripture is God-breathed. Now, this claim, as we find it there in English, translates just three Greek words. Passa, all, graphe, Scriptures, theonouustos, God-breathed. All Scriptures are God-breathed. And these words clearly identify God as the author of Scripture, but they also establish the extent of His authorship, as in what is covered by or what is included in that which is authored by God. First of all, this matter of God as the author of Scripture, grounded in that word, God-breathed. It's really a composite word of these two words in English, God-breathed. In the older versions, the word inspiration was used. But I think it's more helpful to have this very literal and more specific translation, God-breathed. The Scriptures proceed from the very mouth of God. It's not simply that God inspired human writers to write what they wrote, but that God is the one who speaks by the instrumentality of human writers. For this reason, you know, we can and do speak of the double authorship of the Scriptures, of the Bible. Yes, there are human authors, and we acknowledge them as genuine authors. They were involved, they invested their own personalities and background in the production of what they wrote, but there was in parallel and in a more fundamental way, the authorship of God. The Scriptures are God-breathed.

Now, as to the extent of God's authorship, well, Paul says that all Scripture is God-breathed. Now, for Timothy, who was reading this letter that was directed to him, he would have understood that to be a reference to the totality of what we know as the Old Testament. However, in the light of what Paul and others teach, it's clear that the New Testament is also considered to enjoy that same status and authorship as the Old Testament. And so, what we know as the Old and New Testament are Bibles, comes under this category or enjoys the nature of that which is God-breathed. So, Paul affirms that the Scriptures, that the Bible is God's Word. And as God's Word, and this is important when we are thinking about thinking about its authority, reflects the character of the author. God does not lie.

[11 : 29] Therefore, the Scriptures don't lie. God is altogether trustworthy. Therefore, the Scriptures are altogether trustworthy. God doesn't change. Therefore, the fundamental core message of the Scripture doesn't change. God is without error. Therefore, the Scriptures are without error. Or to use the language we sometimes use in this discussion there, infallible, without error, inerrant, without error. Simply words that identify this characteristic of the Bible. And why does it have this characteristic? Because it reflects the character of its author. Now, some could respond, and perhaps with some cause, well, you're telling me that the Bible claims to be God's Word. And that's really what I'm doing. I'm reading from the Bible a claim about the Bible. And some might say, well, that's somewhat suspect logic.

You know, the Bible may say that. The Bible may claim that. But how do I know that to be true? I think that's a fair question to pose. And if you're asking for me to prove to you in some definitive way that this book, the Bible, is God's Word, I don't claim the ability to do that, to prove that to you in a

definitive manner. What Christians have believed, I think with good reason, through the centuries, is that the Bible impresses upon the reader the authenticity of its claims to divine authorship as we read and study its content. So, the Bible itself, we believe, by the working of the Holy Spirit impresses upon the reader its reliability, its trustworthiness, the nature even of its production as God breathed. But if you're unsure, given what I've just said, I can really give you no better advice than to study the Bible for yourself and come to your own conclusions. Don't depend on what I'm saying. You read it for yourself. Study it, read it, meditate on it, and see how the Bible itself impresses upon you its character and its trustworthiness. Now, for Luther, the battle to assert the authority of the Bible, sola scriptura, was fought against those who asserted the parallel authority of tradition and the magisterium, the pope, and his teaching function. Now, while the issue of the authority of Scripture remains a very important one, the battles that we fight today are largely fought on different fronts.

There's a danger of fighting old battles that perhaps are no longer relevant or certainly not as relevant. There are still battles, but they're fought on different fronts with different foes. In the matter of the authority of the Bible, the foes we fight are today, for us, other foes. The foes that I would like to identify too in particular, you can maybe think of others, but two that I would identify, I'll identify in this way, the foe of the flock and the flow, or the foe, sorry, of feelings, flock and feelings. Now, what do I mean by that? Who are these foes that would challenge the authority of the Bible? Well, by the flock, I refer to the majority opinion that has become in many areas of truth that relate to who we are and how we are to live, have become the received wisdom. And this received wisdom is a kind of cultural consensus that often takes on an absolute character that would deride and marginalize any competing truth claim, for example, one from the Scriptures. And over against this cultural consensus, we continue to affirm that in the matters on which it speaks, and we'll come and talk about that a little bit more, but on the matters on which it speaks, the Bible has authority. We continue to affirm sola scriptura. So, the flock is a foe that we need to confront, but also feelings. For those uncomfortable with any external authority, whatever it comes from, whether it be the church or the pulpit or society or liberal elites or whatever this authority come from, that is external, an attractive alternative is our own internal feelings, what we feel or think about something. That can constitute an alternative source of authority. Now, let me just illustrate this with a wee dose of humor from the Babylon Bee. I don't know if some of you are familiar with the Babylon Bee. The Babylon Bee is a website that's a Christian website, but that is dedicated to satire, and it presents its satire in the form of news items. And there was one this week that was kind of curious that it came up this week because it related to what I am talking about. So, let me just read this news item from the Babylon Bee that, in a humorous way, identifies feelings as a new foe to the authority of Scripture. So, the title of the news item is as follows, Progressive Evangelical Leaders Meet to Affirm Doctrine of Sola Fields. An influential group of the nation's top progressive evangelical authors, speakers, and bloggers met Wednesday evening to officially affirm their recently drafted doctrine of Sola Fields, sources confirmed. This is satire, just to be clear.

The new doctrine, translated by Fields alone, formally outlines one of the essentials of modern day progressive evangelicalism, that one's feelings are the supreme authority in all matters of theology and practice. An alleged draft of the creed, which was leaked to the press Thursday morning, reads as follows, 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 our fields or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from our fields, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by Scriptures, church history, or theologians, and it goes on.

[18:20] But I think you get the point. Feelings as being the new ultimate authority. No longer the Bible, no longer God as He expresses His authority in and through His Word, but what I feel. Feel so right, it can't be wrong. If I feel it's okay, then it is okay. Feelings becomes the new authority. And on that battleground we too must affirm sola scriptura. Scriptura stands above my own subjective sense of what might or might not be wrong or right or true. Now, more could be said about this, but the point is simply this, that while we're not living in the 16th century, there is still a battle to be fought to defend the Reformation principle of sola scriptura. The adversaries may change, but the battle continues.

Before moving on to the scope of Scripture, which is the second aspect that I want to touch on, let me just point out or make the point that the Reformers' insistence on sola scriptura did and does not imply or require the rejection of all other sources of authority in matters of faith. The Reformers

themselves recognized and valued the historic creeds and confessions of the church. Indeed, they created their own confessions. But, and this is the crucial point, they acknowledged that all creeds and confessions, however ancient, however valuable, were fallible and are fallible documents.

They're not infallible. They're not incapable of error. They're fallible documents. And as such, they are always subordinate to the Scriptures. So, in our own tradition, in our own church, we have our Confession of Faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith. We value it. We consider it a helpful document. We consider that it helpfully and accurately distills biblical doctrine in a way that we can concur with, and we hold it in high regard. But it is a subordinate standard. It is subordinate to the Bible. We make no claim to infallibility for that confession. To do so would be to threaten and to attack our convictions concerning sola scriptura. So, the authority of Scripture grounded in its authorship. All Scripture is God-breathed. But the second thing I want to touch on, and more briefly, is the scope of Scripture. The Reformers were clear that the Bible enjoys supreme and sole authority on the matters on the ultimate authority on the matters on which it speaks. Our own confession that

I just mentioned a moment ago picks up on this question of the scope of Scripture. In the very first chapter of our Confession, which is on Holy Scripture, the sixth paragraph says the following, "...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 the Spirit or traditions of men." You recognize the language from the satire that distorted it.

[22 : 06] The point is that the Confession recognizes that this authority of the Bible is in matters concerning which it speaks. And in so acknowledging that, the Confession is simply reflecting what we find in our text.

Notice in verse 15 of the passage that we're looking at, Paul is speaking to Timothy and he says to him, "...and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." Paul is identifying the scope of the Bible. He's saying, this is what the Bible does, this is what the Bible concerns itself with, that which you need to know that you might be wise for salvation. In these matters, the Bible has unrivaled authority. In this field of knowledge, the Bible has ultimate and unrivaled authority. All that which makes us wise for salvation.

But he goes on to deal with this matter of the scope of Scripture in verse 16. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. It's useful for training in righteousness. It's not useful for training in mechanical engineering or in, you know, in any other discipline that you may care to mention. That's not its purpose.

It claims no authority in that area. But for training in righteousness, it is indeed our sole authority. And so, this touches on this question of the scope of Scripture. As Christians, and in this we join with the Reformers, we don't claim or imagine that truth is only to be found in the Bible. Rather, we readily acknowledge that there are whole fields of truth on which the Bible is largely or wholly silent.

[24 : 05] If you want to explore all the marvels and intricacies of geology or geophysics and how discoveries in these fields can be applied to reservoir or petroleum engineering, you don't turn to the Bible as a textbook because the Bible has little to say on these matters. Or more, what could we say, more significantly, if you need expert counsel on the ideal formation for a fantasy football team, you won't find much to help you in Habakkuk or Hebrews. But if you're really struggling, you can speak to me after the service. I'm willing to give advice on that particular field. Not a good idea to seek my advice on that in fairness. The scope of Scripture. Now, it's important then to be clear that on this Reformation and biblical principle concerning the scope of Scripture, although it is worth noting in the passing, though the scope is not absolute, it doesn't cover every area of knowledge, it is limited in that sense. It's hardly narrow. The scope of Scripture covers huge areas that are fundamental to us on the origins of the universe, the nature of man, the nature of family, as well as matters directly concerning man's salvation, faith, and life. So, the scope of Scripture.

The third thing I wanted to touch on, and again just briefly, is the clarity of Scripture. Now, you might be surprised to discover that Luther and the 16th century church were largely on the same page in the matter of inspiration. Both agreed that the Bible was inspired, or God breathed, the point that we were making a few moments ago. But the church argued that the Bible, though inspired, was too

complicated, too complex to be understood by ordinary mortals like ourselves, hence the need for tradition and the church teaching function to explain what the likes of ourselves could never possibly understand. And Luther said no to that position. And our text also confirms Luther's conviction concerning the clarity of Scripture. Notice a couple of ways in which it does so. Paul is speaking to Timothy, and then in verse 14, he says to Timothy, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of.

Notice the language he uses. He speaks of something that Timothy had done, an ordinary guy, without great theological training, and yet he had been able to listen to, to process, to consider, to think about, to consider these matters and become convinced of them. He was able to do that. He didn't need a pope or a bishop or even a minister to tell him what to think about these things. He became persuaded. He became convinced of these things. Why? Because of the clarity of Scripture.

But also the clarity of Scripture is implied in the recognition of the Scripture's usefulness for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training. If the Scriptures were so complicated and so complex, then they would be useless for all of these purposes because nobody would understand them.

[27 : 25] Nobody would be equipped. Nobody would be trained. Nobody would be rebuked because it would be such a mystery. But Paul takes it as a given that these are things that we can understand, that there is a clarity on these matters for the believer as the Scriptures are read and listened to and meditated upon.

I'm reminded of the words of William Tyndale given that we're on a Reformation theme. William Tyndale was a 16th century English reformer and Bible translator who on one occasion in conversation with a hostile priest famously affirmed, if God spare my life, before very long I shall cause a plowboy to know the Scriptures better than you do. Now, that was not only a memorable retort, but the words capture that Reformation principle of the clarity of Scripture. Tyndale was persuaded that if only the Bible could be translated into English, a plowboy could understand. A plowboy could learn those things that are necessary for salvation and for being equipped in righteousness. No need for some great academic training in order to understand these things, though academic training is, of course, a gift of God that can be employed in the study of Scripture. The Reformation and Biblical principle of the clarity of Scripture, taking hand in hand with our understanding of the scope of Scripture, also has implications for, and indeed provides the foundation or provides the foundation for Christian liberty. In what sense?

And we can't develop this, but it's worth making the point. Given the clarity of Scripture, there is no need for a priestly caste to absolutely and tyrannically impose from above what we are to believe and how we are to live. We enjoy Christian liberty in this matter. We have the Bible for ourselves, and we can study the Bible, and we can come to our conclusions. It's a matter that the Confession itself picks up on as being of importance. Indeed, there's a very chapter on the matter of Christian liberty. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free, that is, our conscience, from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, and it goes on. See, this is one of the implications of the clarity of Scripture. If it were the case that the Scripture was so complicated and impossible to understand, then others would step in and say, ah, you can't really understand the Bible.

I'll tell you how you should live. I'll tell you what's forbidden and what's allowable. And the Reformers said, no, we don't need others to come in and tell us. The Bible is sufficient, and it's sufficiently clear for ordinary men and women to read and understand and live by.

One final aspect of Scripture that, again, we'll touch on just very fleetingly, and that is the purpose of Scripture. Now, there is evident overlap between the scope of Scripture and the purpose of Scripture.

[30 : 34] I think they're almost equivalent concepts, but there is a distinct and important point that I want to emphasize in specifically speaking of the purpose of Scripture. The purpose of Scripture of the Bible, or God's purpose in providing us with His Word, is transformation. God's purpose is that the reading and study of the Bible accompanied by the work of His Spirit would serve to transform men and women and boys and girls. And again, the passage that we read there in 2 Timothy makes that so clear.

We've already touched on how Paul says to Timothy that the Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus. It's not just that in the Bible we can find out truths concerning God that are reliable and accurate, and we can read them and say, well, isn't it good to know that about

God?

Isn't it good to know that God has these attributes and so on and so forth? No, Paul is saying the purpose of the Bible, God's purpose in providing us with the Bible is that we would be transformed, that we would be saved. The purpose of the Bible is to point us and indeed draw us to Jesus. Wisdom, if we are to be wise for salvation, wisdom is to see yourself as you really are, a sinner in need of a Savior. Wisdom is to recognize Jesus as the only and sufficient Savior. Wisdom is to lay hold of Jesus as your Savior and trust in Him. Have you done this? Have you recognized in the light of the Bible your condition as a sinner?

Have you discovered that Jesus is the Savior? Have you trusted in Him as your Savior? This is the purpose of the Bible to make you wise for salvation. It is interesting that Paul says this to Timothy who was already trusting in Jesus, which points us in the direction of understanding that salvation is something to be discovered and experienced, and faith in Jesus is something to be cultivated and deepened throughout our lives. This first purpose to make us wise unto salvation is not exhausted the day we become Christians. It continues to be a purpose of the Scriptures as we walk in the faith. And this purpose of transformation is also captured in what Paul says about the Bible being useful to thoroughly equip God's people for every good work. We have been created for good works. We have been called to good works, and our passage provides a third and necessary element. We are by the Bible equipped, or being equipped, for every good work. And so there we have in very fleeting words, the purpose of the Bible. It is God's purpose to transform you, to transform us, to transform sinners, to bring us to Himself, and to equip us for a life lived to His glory. Sola Scriptura, the authority of Scripture, the scope of Scripture, the clarity of Scripture, but also the purpose, the purpose of God in giving us the Bible.

Let me close by quoting the words of a prayer of the French 16th century reformer Theodore Biza. And you'll find that if you have bought your study guide, and it's not really intended as a little plug for the study guide, but that is where I saw it, and it struck me as worth making mention of.

[34 : 16] Just in closing this morning, there on the first page of the first lesson, you'll find this quote that is a prayer of this reformer. And he prays in this way, directing this prayer to God.

Your word of life has been and still remains among us, faithfully collected in the sacred registers of the Holy Scripture, the image of Your glory, the law of Your kingdom, the ladder of heaven, the gate of paradise, the trumpet of salvation, the treasure of piety, virtue, wisdom, consolation, and perfection. Well, let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for the Bible. We thank You that You are a God who speaks to us. We thank You that You speak clearly. We thank You that everything that we need to know concerning salvation, concerning the life of faith, is to be found in Your Word, the Bible. We pray that it would be to us, and in increasing measure, more precious than gold and sweeter than honey from the coal. Heavenly Father, we pray that You would help us to discern the battles that are to be fought in defense of Your Word, and to fight them winsomely and wisely and honestly. Heavenly Father, we pray that the purpose that You have in providing the Bible would be a purpose that is fulfilled in us, that we all gathered here this morning would know what it is to be wise for salvation and to be increasingly equipped equipped for every good work. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.