

Scripture Alone

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[0 : 00] Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your word to us, and we pray that you would give us ears to hear it, to hear it speak with truth and authority into our lives, and that your Holy Spirit would do this in us.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, we're in week three of a five-week series in the five solos of the Reformation. And these five solos, you know, sola is the Latin for alone. These five alones, they aim to reorient our life around the truth of the gospel, which is God's free gift of justification, justification by faith through Jesus Christ.

And the five onlys of this gospel reformation, the five onlys is that our salvation is through faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, revealed in the scriptures alone, and to the glory of God alone.

Those are the five solos. And they work together, they kind of weave together to just reorient us back to the gospel. That's what the reformers were doing.

[1 : 14] And this is how the Anglican 39 articles articulate the sola scriptura, the scripture alone. That's the sola we're going to be looking at today. This is how Anglicanism articulates it.

In article number six, 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 person, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

So all the articles state something positively and then something negatively. Positively, it says scripture contains all things necessary to salvation, and then negatively it says there is nothing outside of scripture that can be made authoritative or normative or demanded of you to believe by faith, except scripture alone.

That's how Anglicanism expresses sola scriptura. But it's helpful for us to understand the context that this slogan came about in. What was going on 500 years ago? What was the problem that the reformers were addressing in the church?

So 500 years ago, the Catholic Church taught that a person could only understand the Bible with the help of the church. The church tradition, church councils, the Pope, all of those things interpret scripture for us, and then they act as a mediator between us and God.

[2 : 38] In fact, they end up acting as a mediator between us and salvation, in a manner of speaking. So the church holds the interpreting authority, and therefore it holds the authority to offer salvation itself.

So here we have scripture alone boldly declaring that God's word is both sufficient and clear on its own. The basic gospel narrative of scripture, the reformers said, is so clear as revealed by God himself that it can be understood by almost anyone.

It can be even understood by children. It can be understood if this is your first time in a church today. The gospel is that clear. And I like to think that this family service is kind of a living illustration of Sola Scriptura.

I hope it will be anyway. But if you can imagine for a moment that the Roman Catholic Church is over here on the right side of the reformers, there was also a group on the far left side, what we now call the radical reformers.

And these were men and women who also wanted to reject church tradition, but they wanted to reject it entirely. And they wanted to elevate spiritual experience above all else.

[3 : 49] They wanted to say that the only thing that is going to be authoritative for me is my personal, it's just going to be me and the scriptures. I won't let, I won't even let the scripture have authority over me ultimately.

That's what it came down to. And so I want you to picture the Roman Catholic Church and the radical reformers on either side of Martin Luther and John Calvin and others as they are charting a middle way under this slogan, Sola Scriptura.

And they responded by saying that if the Bible is God's word, which contains all things necessary for salvation, then logically the scriptures hold their own interpretive authority.

This became known as scripture interprets scripture. You might have heard that before. The reformers recognized that scripture can never be taken captive by either human tradition or by human spiritual experience.

But it's important to also recognize that when we start talking about, you know, the Bible, the Bible alone. Do I have a Bible? Nope. No Bibles. There's an NLT.

[4 : 58] That's a Bible. That when we talk about the Bible alone, it's not in the sense that this is the only source of all truth.

You know, it's not to say like, okay, are you doing your income taxes? Are you learning Mandarin? Do you have a plumbing problem at home? Are you making recipes for your weekly meal plan? Oh, don't worry. It's all in scripture, right? We know that sounds, that's foolish. It sounds ridiculous. That has been, that's called Biblicism. And what it does is it just forces scripture to function in a way that it was never meant to function.

But rather, scripture alone means that God's word is the first and the supreme authority for knowing God and living in relationship with him. So that both the church and all tradition and our own spiritual experience, they ultimately come under that authority.

So that we would never see the Bible as something that, you know, I stand on top of and I get the final word. But if it's helpful, you can imagine that the Bible is sort of, we stand under it.

[6 : 03] And it has ultimate authority. This is how the, this is how the reformers invite you and I to open God's word. They invite, they are inviting us to open it with humility and, and to hear these words as the words of Christ himself calling you to repentance and faith.

So that Sola Scriptura is inviting us to read the Bible with, on one side, with Christian brothers and sisters from 2,000 years of church tradition.

And also on the other side, to read it alongside Christians, brothers and sisters in community today, in your local church. Listening for the work of the Holy Spirit in your own experiences today.

Do you see how that works? Scripture alone, with the church and all tradition, with our own spiritual experiences, underneath the authority of the word of God. At the end of the day, someone has to have the final say.

Scripture alone says, Scripture interprets Scripture. And God has the final say. And now to help us, to help us just further discover the treasure and the benefit of Sola Scriptura, I want to invite you to open your pew Bibles to Isaiah chapter 55, which I believe is on page 615.

[7 : 19] Do you have another one? I think you have a second Bible there. Thank you. Isaiah 55. And I'm going to read for us in a moment, beginning at verse 10.

But I just want you to know that this is a chapter that's going to give us a God-centered view on the power and the purpose of God's word. A God-centered view.

So would you look with me, starting at the bottom of page 615 there, with verse 10. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. God's using an analogy here.

He says that just as rain and snow, they come down from the sky out of heaven, and they come down with a power and a purpose to bring new life.

[8 : 33] They cause new things to grow, and then they provide food for us to eat. So too, God's word, it goes out and it will not return empty. It is living and it's active, and it will act with power to bring life to those it encounters.

That's God's promise. And the reformers declared this as, they called it the sufficiency of scripture, the sufficiency of God's word. Not that it's sufficient for stock tips or that kind of silliness, but that it will accomplish, this is a good and important thing to remember, God's word will accomplish everything for which it was divinely given.

Verse 11 says it this way, God's word has a purpose, and it will always succeed in the thing for which God sends it. So the question for us is, what is this purpose? Because if we think that purpose is going to be, you know, to give us, you know, to tell us how to do our home renovations or what to cook for dinner, then we're going to be frustrated.

We're going to think that God's word has no power. But that's not its purpose. The purpose is revealed in verse 6 and 7. So have a look just a little bit back over the page, middle of the column there, verse 6.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

[10:03] What we see here is God's call for us, God's call to us. Three times he calls us, seek the Lord, he says. He says, forsake wickedness, forsake unrighteousness, and return to me, return to the Lord.

This is a call to repentance. It's a call forsaking and returning, a call to repentance. And the amazing thing here is we discover that God's word is a means of grace.

He speaks with power, but this power is not going to be used to destroy us. But it's going to be used to forgive us and to give us life. Verse 7, the end of verse 7.

Return to the Lord so that he may, what? Have compassion on you. Return to our God. He will abundantly pardon you. Ever since the very beginning of time, God's word has acted for the purpose of creation and recreation.

In Genesis 1, we see that God said, let there be light, and there was light. And then for generations, God spoke through his prophets in order to reveal his steadfast love and to call his people to repentance and to new life with him.

[11:17] That was the purpose of his word. And then, ultimately, scripture comes to the climax. And we see that God's word became flesh and dwelt among us as God's own son, Jesus Christ.

And he also came with the same power for creating new life. In the book of Isaiah, chapter 53, it talks about the servant of the Lord, this Messiah, this king who's coming.

And it tells us that he will be crushed for our sins. He'll be wounded so that we can be healed. And that brings us, as we close now, to God's written word, sola scriptura.

God's word, the Bible, it has the very same purpose. I want this to be very clear that this book is not a textbook. It's living and active in a way that no other book has ever been written.

That the Holy Spirit is its inspired author alongside many human authors. And makes it utterly unique. And that this miracle, this book, is a gift to us.

[12:27] So that we might meet Jesus Christ and experience new life through Christ's justifying work of salvation. And then that we might share this good news with others. I mean, that's why this book is being translated into every language that is being spoken in the world today.

So that that good news can be shared with every man, woman, and child. And outside the church, the Bible is treated, frankly, as an outdated and offensive book.

And we'd be better off just letting it go out of print. But even inside the church, many Christians are either embarrassed by what the Bible says, or they have become skeptical that it still has that power that it once did to transform the world.

And so evangelical churches, you know, evangelicals are churning out by the hundreds, year after year, how-to books on how to evangelize, how to disciple, how to change the world.

But they seem to have lost faith in the power of God's word to act in the way that he promises it would. That when it leaves his mouth, it will never return empty.

[13:39] So, Sola Scriptura and Isaiah 55, if they leave any impression on you today, I pray that you will hear me say that God's word is a gift to you. And that he uses it to call you to repentance and faith.

And that when you hear and receive it, it will never return to him empty, because he promises that it will transform you. It will shape you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And I would invite you now just to close with me by reading aloud the final two verses of Isaiah 55. I'd like to read this all together, verses 12 and 13, because these are the future promises that God's word is making all things new.

Let's read this together. Amen.