

SCRIPTURE ALONE

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[0 : 00] In my early days as involved in ministry, going back a number of years now, I wasn't particularly schooled in the traditions of the church.

And so therefore you make a number of mistakes. I remember that one day distributing communion was my first time, in fact, ever distributing communion. And there was a bunch of people out the front there.

The bread had gone through. And I knew the system. I'd watched people do this. It seemed pretty straightforward. You went along, followed the person with the bread, and you gave them a bit of a drink from the cup.

You said a few words, and you wiped the cup in a certain way, and you handed it to the next person, and next person, next person. On this particular Sunday, which was my first time, there was a number of guests there at church.

And I just assumed, quite ignorantly, that everyone took it exactly the same way. Until I got to this gentleman, and I had the cup.

[1 : 02] I said a few words, and I put the cup in front of him. And he didn't take it. Well, he mustn't want it. So I stood there, and he looked at me, and I looked at him.

We're trying to communicate silently about what's meant to happen at this point. He didn't take it. And then eventually, all he did, kneeling in front of me, was grab the cup just with that much of his fingers and his thumb.

I didn't realize at that particular point that in some church traditions, you're not actually meant to touch the cup at all. I still regard it as, in fact, the actual body and blood of Christ. And only a person who's me, who's been ordained like a priest, should touch this thing.

More full than him, because I actually wasn't one at the time. But he only touched it. And I'm sort of standing there thinking, he hasn't got a good grip on that cup. I didn't realize that what I'm meant to do is to sort of tip it towards him.

I didn't know that. I was completely ignorant. And I'm thinking, he hasn't really got a grip. He's looking at me. He's just touching it. I'm looking at him thinking, get a better grip. And then I thought, well, he's an early gentleman.

[2 : 10] He must know what he's doing. So I let it go. And so what happened in that particular moment was, these little tiny grip he had meant that the cup, which was about three quarters full, tilted and went bang, under his nose.

And I think that's why one of the reasons why one of the church traditions is you should use white wine and not red wine, is because red wine has a tendency of staining.

And this three quarters of a full cup hit his nose, went onto his glasses and down his shirt. And so I had no idea what to do.

Of course, the minister at the time saw this unfolding, decided not to rescue me. He ducked off into the vestry and was killing himself laughing. I could see him from where I was.

And all I could think of was, well, I've got a cloth, put my hand on his head, and I was wiping his glasses so he could see. And whatever sins he thought he was being absolved for in that moment didn't include the glare on his face at me, I can tell you after that.

[3 : 19] I had no concept at all that for some people in church traditions, the traditions mattered a lot to them. A lot to them. And it's interesting that when you turn to the Bible, that Jesus debates with the religious leaders of his time the subject of the traditions we have.

It came up often for the religious people that Jesus dealt with. The religious guys were constantly outraged with this Jesus, who did not observe their traditions as he said they thought they should be observed.

That they thought were actually, in fact, mandatory. And in Matthew 15, Jesus, he zeroes in on this issue of the real problem with traditions.

He says that they have this awful potential to undermine, over time, the very obedience in God's word that they were originally may have been intended to express.

He says that the human heart is almost limitless in its capacity to come up with rules and regulations and traditions that may at some point have been quite useful and helpful, but which gradually become more distorted, more corrupted, more, in fact, important than the word of God and obedience to the word of God.

[4 : 52] The human heart's almost limitless in its capacity to do that. And that's the issue, or certainly one of the issues, one of the sparks that ignited the Protestant Reformation in the 1600s.

Sorry, in the 16th century. In 1516, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar, was sent to Germany by the Roman Catholic Church to sell these things called indulgences.

According to Roman Catholic theology, an indulgence is kind of like a get-out-of-jail-free card to lessen the amount of time that a person needs to suffer in order to go to heaven.

So they would have this view that you would go to purgatory, and an indulgence could be granted by a priest to lessen the amount of time in purgatory so that you could eventually go to heaven.

You see, Roman Catholic teaching states that purgatory is the place that the soul goes to after death to get purged. Their thinking is that while Jesus died on the cross for our sins, his death was not effective for complete cleansing of sin.

[6 : 15] Roman Catholic teaching states that there is still a corruption of the human heart, of the soul that remains, which needs to be purged. And the way you purge it is by suffering.

And then once you've gone through the appropriate amount of suffering, you can then go from that stage into heaven. That's what purgatory is. And it's in this climate in the Middle Ages that saw the abuse of these indulgences which were granted by priests, and ultimately the exploitation of the poor and the ignorant.

What happened was indulgences came up for sale. You could buy an indulgence to raise funds, and the reason why the church started to sell them is because they needed money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and many other building projects.

And the easiest way was to sell indulgences, to get guilty people out of purgatory, relatives out of purgatory, myself out of purgatory, in order that I could go into heaven.

And masses of money was raised. But the unsuspecting masses of people didn't know that purgatory nor indulgences weren't in fact in the Bible, let alone that it wasn't possible to buy someone into heaven.

[7 : 42] He said, back in the 1500s, the members of churches, unlike us today, did not have the Bible in their own language. You would walk into church as a German-speaking person in Luther's time, and everything would be done in Latin.

And you would just sit there and watch. They couldn't read the Bible for themselves. The only authority on the way of salvation was what they were told by the priests and what they were told by the church, what they were told was in the Bible.

And it was a situation that got under the skin of the German monk and the theologian Martin Luther. On the 31st of October, 1517, Martin Luther wrote to his bishop, Albert of Mainz, protesting the sale of indulgences.

He enclosed in his letter a copy of his disputation of Martin Luther on the power and efficacy of indulgences, which came to be known throughout history as the 1995 Thesis.

As Sam said, it was nailed to the door of Castle Church Wittenberg so that all who could read could engage with Martin Luther's writing.

[9 : 00] This letter began the Reformation, which swept through Western Europe, saw the establishment of the Protestant church, and recaptured the heart, the very heart of the Christian message.

Luther ultimately saw indulgences as a travesty of God's way of salvation, which was one for us, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He saw that this church tradition had grossly subverted what the Bible taught about getting right with God and receiving eternal life. And so Luther and a whole bunch of other men and women were moved to put their livelihoods and their homes and their fortunes and their very lives on the line to restore to the Christian church the core teachings of the Christian faith so that the masses of

people could have freedom in Christ, could know the joy, the joy of salvation, the Christian gospel. And so translated into English, the five assertions from the Reformers is that salvation is according to Scripture alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, all for the glory of God alone. And Martin Luther, when he was called to account, took his stand on the Bible. This was the key principle of the Protestant Reformation and remains one of the striking differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church to this very day, that the final authority in all matters of faith and of life is found only in the written word of God.

[10:56] Only in the written word of God. Other sources and authorities of knowledge have their place, such as reason and experience of tradition, but the final, the overruling authority, belongs to God as he speaks to us through his word, the Bible.

Now that's a claim that is just as challenging today, in 2017, as it was 500 years ago in 1517. You see, we exist in a culture that asserts that there's no absolute truth that must be understood, that needs to be accepted, and certainly is not authority for everyone's life.

Now, ironically, the culture that we exist in that says there's no absolute truth is a bit hypocritical, because the assertion that there is no absolute truth is in fact an absolute truth claim in and of itself. Our culture says that truth is what you make it. It's what seems right to you, and whatever truth is right for you might not be right for someone else.

So truth is up to the individual, which ultimately means follow your feelings. And therefore, what flows from that, when there's no absolute truth, and you make up truth, that means that truth and authority flow together.

[12:22] If I believe this is true for me, you've got no right to tell me it's not true for me. Truth and authority go together. And what I want us to come to see here, to become awakened to, is the authority of God's word over our life does not lead to bondage as our culture claims.

It leads to salvation. It leads to freedom. It leads to joy. That's what biblical authority leads to. 2 Timothy 3, 14, 15, continuing what you have learned and have become convinced of because of those to whom you've learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

That's what the scriptures do. They lead you into salvation and joy and hope. We need to know that the God who defines all things and creates all things and rules all things, has worked to save all things, has spoken.

He's spoken. He has spoken loud. He's spoken clear. He's spoken with more authority. That every other voice we will hear on YouTube and Facebook and everywhere else over every situation that we face in life.

So let's just go for a bit of a journey there. I want to go back to Psalm 119. Make the connection between God and truth, and therefore what flows from that is authority over our lives.

[14:02] That's Psalm 119 verse 155. Let me just go on a little bit of excursion here just for a little bit, and I'm going to probably hit this point a little bit later.

500 years ago, you go to church, you don't get the Bible in your own language. You sat there and you observed. 500 years later, we got in our own language. I think it's appalling that we would ever go to church and not have the Bible in front of us opened.

So please do that right now. Psalm 119. People died in order to get the Scriptures in our hands right now so that we would understand God clearly speaking to us.

If you have not got a Bible in your hand right now, put your hand up, and our ushers will come to you and they will get you a Bible in your hand right now. Okay, back on topic. Psalm 119.

Psalm 115.

[15:21] All your words are true. All your righteous laws are eternal. Notice those words are talking about, those sentences are talking about God communicating.

Decrees, laws, statutes, words, precepts. Then it says in verse 160 that when God speaks, precepts, laws, decrees, when he speaks, what he speaks is true, it's eternal, it's righteous. And the word translated all at the beginning there in verse 160 in the NIV literally means head. Means head. It could mean the head of a body, it could mean the head of a tribe, it could mean the head of a river. And the word used here in verse 119 as head is the same word that's used in Exodus 30 verse 12.

I'll read it to you. When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted.

[16:38] It's also used in Numbers chapter 1 verse 2. Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families. What Psalm 119 says is that if you took a census of the word of God, the conclusion would be is that the sum total of the word of God, the Bible is truth.

The totality of the Bible is truth. But notice the second half of verse 160. It says, all your righteous laws are eternal. So it's not just the sum total which is truth.

It's all the individual parts that are truth. The census would reveal that all of it as well as the parts of it are all true. It's truth.

So what it's saying here is that when God speaks, what he speaks is truth. Truth is what he says. And the reason why God's word is ultimately truth and it's overruling and it has final authority is because God is ultimate reality.

that's the reason. God is absolute. There is nothing higher than God. There is no one, no thing equal with God. There is not another opinion beside his.

[18:22] back in Exodus when at the burning bush God said to Moses go to Egypt and sort them out and get my people out of there.

And God Moses said to God well if they ask me who sent you what should I say to them? God said tell them I am. And you go that's not helpful.

You know someone rings up can I speak to Steve Jeffrey? Yes you can. Who is he? I am. You know like it's someone asked me what's your name? I am. I mean what's I'm defined by certain things because God stands over I am I am absolute.

There is nothing apart from me. There is no reality before God all is void all is formless he is the God from everlasting to everlasting no beginning no end he stands outside of all things that he's created he doesn't need anything that he's created never beginning never ending never becoming never improving simply and absolutely is there to be dealt with on his terms or not at all that's God every other God that we've formed in our minds it's less than that it's simply because we've formed it in our minds we cannot comprehend the absoluteness of God let it hit you brothers and sisters God the God in whose name we gather today the one who has spoken to us through his word who we sing about the one who we pray to never ever had a beginning there's nothing that we look at in this world or could touch or feel a sense that has never had a beginning the one who never had a beginning but always was and is and will be he's the one who defines all things that is and are whether we want him to be there or not he's there we do not negotiate with what we want reality to be and what we want

God to be God defines reality that's why the reformation state begins with scripture alone and finishes all to the glory of God alone no ranting no raving no sophisticated doubt or skepticism has any effect on the existence of God he simply and absolutely is and if we don't like it we can change for our joy or we can resist for our destruction but one thing remains absolutely true absolutely unchanged God is he was there before we became he'll be there when we are gone and therefore what matters above all things in life is this God I cannot escape the simple and the obvious truth that God must be the main thing in life because he defines all things you see when God speaks he doesn't just interpret history when God speaks history it's not his interpretation on the way things have happened in the world when God speaks he creates history if he didn't speak it wouldn't have existed he doesn't interpret history he creates history therefore this church has to do with God because life has to do with God and life has to do with God because all the universe has to do with God and all the universe has to do with God because every atom and every emotion and every soul of every angelic demonic and human being belongs to God who absolutely is he created everything that is he sustains everything in being he created and directs the course of all events because from him and through him and to him are all things and to him be glory forever according to

[22:35] Romans 11 36 reality is created it is determined it's defined by God and truth is when this God chooses to communicate reality the way things actually are that's what truth is it's when God chooses to communicate reality that is for something to be true it has to represent reality otherwise it's a myth it's a fantasy or it's a lie when God speaks he reveals reality left to our own devices we've got no ability as human beings don't care how smart we are we've got no ability at all to discover reality and truth but God has revealed the way things simply are the one who exists in inapproachable light has come to us and made himself known so that we are not left in the darkness and the place where reality the way things actually are and the communication of that reality come together in their most profound sense is in the person of the

Lord Jesus first it's because Jesus speaks truth Jesus says this in John 18 for I came into the world to testify to the truth everyone on the side of truth listens to me that is Jesus saying here that he speaks truth when Jesus speaks he speaks truth he came to testify to truth and if you want to know what truth is you need to listen to Jesus but he said something slightly more profound than that in John 14 I am the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the father except through me he says I don't just speak truth I am truth the most ultimate reason why he could say that he was the truth is that he is the

God that's why and that's what in fact John one affirms it says in the beginning was the word that is he existed before anything was made this word existed before anything was made and the word was with God and the word was God and he was with God at the beginning and through him that's through the word all things were made without him nothing was made that has been made and then down in verse 14 we see something incredibly startling this word this communication of reality and the connection of reality became flesh and he made his dwelling amongst us we have seen his glory the glory of the one and only who became the father full of grace and truth and so the question in John 1 is who is this word who is God who existed before creation who created everything and this word who is full of grace and truth verse 15

John testifies concerning him he cries out truth and reality the way things actually are that's why Jesus has authority over all things as Philippians 2 says he doesn't just speak the word of God he doesn't just speak the truth he is the word of God he is the truth he is God the place where reality and the communication of that reality come together in the most profound sense is in the person of Jesus and Jesus himself endorsed the message of

Psalms 119 verse 60 when he says in Matthew 5 do not think that I've come to abolish the law of the prophets I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them I tell you the truth until heaven and earth disappear not the smallest letter not the least stroke of pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished in is that the whole Old Testament is pointing to him all of God's revelation of reality and truth is pointing in the person of Jesus the Bible as the word of God is where we have God revealing the way things actually are and so the assertion I'll make and I'm happy to argue this in much more detail you can buy one book on scripture alone it's got 491 pages in it it's massive so trying to summarize a little bit 66 books of the

[28 : 10] Bible with Jesus at the center is truth that is absolute revealed to us from a God who defines all things who creates all things who sustains all things it's truth and Jesus says this about the truth it will set you free it's about liberation it's not about bondage it's not about having a God who is ogre over the top of all things the gospel that he came the truth that he revealed is that we as sinners have been saved through the glorious work of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection and so the Bible is where God speaks what is real what is absolute and so it's true the Bible is the way that God the ultimate all important reality reveals himself to us with clarity and with authority today if

God is more important than anything else then the Bible is more important than anything but God and what we need to embrace what we need to be confident in is the whole word of God as truth with the Lord Jesus at the center of that truth and the gospel the glorious gospel that sets us free from all of our bondage to sin and darkness is at the center the God who made everything controls everything has a purpose for everything this is the God who has spoken and in 2 Timothy 3 16 it says that all scripture is God breathed that comes it all came from him and is not left without the revelation the way of salvation what we have hopefully you've got in your hands right now is simply priceless and if we could awaken our hearts and our minds that this is with confidence that this is so just imagine how we would live our lives just imagine how we would navigate the complexities of life in this world that we see on Facebook and Twitter and the political scene just imagine how we would navigate the relational issues the implication for our lives would be countless and vital God has not left us without a way to measure every single vital thing that we face in this life he reveals himself only so much and in so far as he thinks is necessary for us to know him for our salvation and life but everything that's vital he touches either directly or by implication the Bible is God's provision for us it is sufficient for life and faith everything we face in this Bible is touched in the Bible I've got no doubt that there are plenty things that we need to know about but the Bible is the sun of the solar system of all learning it gives light it gives perspective it gives meaning its truth needs to permeate everything it's not one it's not one among many books it's the central book all ideas will be judged by this book this book will be known first and better than all other books and all other ideas and all other information but hear the warning of John 5

Jesus said in John 5 to the religious elite you diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you will possess eternal life these are the scriptures that testify about me and yet you refuse to come to me to have life it is possible to search the Bible for God and miss God it is possible to be fluent in the scriptures to be able to quote scriptures offhand and yet totally miss relationship with God in the whole process if we pursue knowledge of God for its own sake it is bound to go bad for us it will make us proud it will make us conceited you can always tell if someone's proud or conceited in terms of their knowledge of God it comes out in the way of their attitude as theologian J.R. Packer has written to be preoccupied with getting biblical knowledge as an end in itself to approach Bible study with no higher motive than a desire to know all the answers is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied self-deception it's not good enough just to know your Bible we must know the God of the Bible so what's the ultimate aim in wanting to know God through the Bible the supreme desire of the writer of Psalm 119 was to know and enjoy God himself and he valued knowledge about God simply as a means to that end he wanted to know about God in order to know God he wanted to know the truth about God so that his heart might respond to and his life might be conformed to him it is not good enough to simply know your Bible our aim is in seeking to know Jesus and to be led to Jesus and in being led to Jesus have life in Jesus our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance with God who defines all things and so one tip if I can just go here a little bit practical one tip on how to turn your knowledge about God into a knowledge of God is by both and I think this is demanding and simple at the same time so here it is turn every truth that we learn about God into a matter of meditation before God leading to prayer and praise to God say it again turn every truth that we learn about God into a matter of meditation before God leading to prayer and praise to God meditation is simply the activity of calling to mind and lingering over and dwelling on and applying yourself what you've learnt from the Bible about the works, the ways, the purpose, the promises and the character of God and the effect will be to humble us as we contemplate God's greatness and glory in our own smallness our own sinfulness and to encourage and to comfort us and reassure us as we contemplate the unsearchable riches of God's mercy to us in Jesus there's so much more that could be said the church of the middle ages cut people off from the word of God they cut people off from the word of God and therefore they cut people off from God it was a capital crime in the 1400s in Britain to translate the scriptures into the language of the people a capital crime they burn people alive for even reading fragments of the English Bible taking a page out of the Bible

I mean just a page you got burnt at the stake for that including children they burnt children at the stake it was an evil that ultimately descended people into darkness and fear but Martin Luther as a German monk had access to the Bible he could read Latin and he discovered something in his reading of the Bible something that he had not heard from the priests something he had not heard from the official doctrines of the church and it was simply this sinners are attractive because they are loved they are not loved because they are attractive he read that in Romans and joy filled his heart Luther discovered in the Bible that God is glorious that he is beautiful that he is good that he is kind that he is generous he discovered it was possible to know God and enjoy him through his word and this year we celebrate 500 years since that discovery went public it was all about the recovery of beautiful truth that has changed

[37 : 32] Luther's life and changed the lives of millions of people around this world from all different cultures and backgrounds even from kids as 2 Timothy says even from your infancy you could know the way of salvation so may we be thankful that we have the scriptures in our language and that we can know them and that they can make us wise for salvation and one of our commitments as a church standing in that 500 year tradition is written on the board out there Christ centred Bible saturation is a core value of our church it says that we value individual and corporate biblical reflection and assessment of life and ministry of authority of Bible teaching and preaching over reason experience and tradition the God centredness of all biblical truth passing on to the next generation of biblically informed love for God every believer taking responsibility to be spiritually and physically prepared to listen and obey as God's word is taught every believer having a vital personal study time where the Bible is read meditated on memorized prayed over and obeyed so let me just stand aside here very quickly we're signing up for community groups the core thing we do in community groups is to sit around and study the scriptures and pray and encourage each other pastor one another through God's word we're signing up for them in the next couple of weeks join a community group that's first of all second thing

Adrian's running a course in the next couple of weeks soon it's in the bulletin anyway on investigating Christianity through the word understanding who God is and what he's done for us so Adrian stick your hand up so we know who you are go and see Adrian if you want to sign up for that one and thirdly if you haven't done it already get involved in a personal personal walk with God the battle for the authority of God's word in our lives is a personal battle it's not just one that the church holds to it's a personal battle is it easier for you to go to the opinions of others than it is to go to God's word how often are you soaking yourself in God's word this battle is a personal battle that starts with me I've a couple of you know I've been going through a period lately of what I would call spiritual dryness and one of the things that has helped me enormously is to get a help like this buying from Curon and a bunch of other places a help like this of daily devotions and I've been going just slowly through Galatians and rediscovering and applying the gospel the core teachings of the Bible the gospel the Christian message into my life grab one of these or something like it and get into the word yourself you can only be malnourished if all you're relying upon is a sermon from me week in week out that's all you're doing and as we look at our future together do we have confidence in the word of God to accomplish the work of God in our life and in this community temptation of our society to say get rid of it it's archaic do we have confidence that God speaks through his word and when he speaks through his word life and joy and salvation is the result so as we pursue

Christ-centered Bible situation for the next 500 years here at St. Paul's may our reading our memorizing our songs our ministries our missions all of our theological questioning all of our relational issues be submitted to the word of God fads and fashions will rise and they will fall our fame will rise and it will fall but the word of God stands forever Isaiah 40 the word of God will outlive you so submit to it all people are like grass and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field the grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them surely the people are grass the grass withers and the flowers fall but the word of God endures forever let's pray gracious father how thankful we are for William Tyndall 480 480 something years ago he was strangled to death and his body was burnt so that we could have your word in our laps today in this church so father may there be nothing trivial about the way we speak about your word may there be nothing trivial about the way that we treat it here as a church or we as individuals not primarily because we owe a debt to Tyndall but because it is you you the God who sits over all things speaking to us and without your word to us we are dead we are in darkness father we we pray that the children amongst us will be shaped by the reverence they see from us adults coming in from your word and to your word may there be thousands would grow up revering the God of the Bible and the word of the God of the Bible and so father we pray for transformation in the lives of our culture and our society and we pray for transformation amongst us cause and awakening to the truth as you revealed it from yourself from your word to us we ask it for your glory that your name might be praised above all things amen