

Scripture Alone

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[0 : 00] Turn with me now, please, to the passage we read in 2 Timothy chapter 3, especially verses 16 and 17, which we'll look at briefly this morning.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. It's not every piece of paper that has had such an impact on society virtually throughout the world. It's not every piece of paper that has lasted in importance for 500 years.

But this month, just next week, is the 500th anniversary of the date we understand Martin Luther pinned his piece of paper, the 95 Theses, as it was called, to the door of the church in Wittenberg. And that piece of paper changed the course of history in many ways. For many, of course, today, that really doesn't matter anymore. The Reformation is something that belongs to the long-forgotten mists of history.

[1 : 18] And indeed, for many people, sadly, the things that were so central to the Reformation are regarded as no longer relevant for society today. Indeed, some would go so far, many would go so far as to say they're positively destructive and harmful for human society or for lives individually.

That's not, of course, our opinion, simply because we know how important these great principles of the Reformation were. And they were important, not just for our lives individually and for our relationship personally with God and for the church and for the way in which the church understood itself and its role in society.

The Reformation had a huge impact through the power of the gospel on not only personal matters, but political matters, social matters, educational matters, economic matters.

All of these areas of human life and society were impacted very positively and powerfully by the Reformation and what the Reformation set in motion.

And sadly, many of those who would now discount the Reformation as of any importance really don't understand that it's out of that, out of that Reformation and what it set in motion, that you find such things as democracy, social justice, care for individuals, health matters, the education of children and adults, and especially the word of God itself being made freely available to individuals.

[2 : 58] We're going to spend a few weeks looking at the solas of the Reformation as they came to be called. There were five great solas in summary that the Reformation set out.

And that's the teaching that began with the Reformation was then formulated more as time went on. These five great solas came to be of lasting importance and are important to us today.

Solas being the Latin word for only or alone. And the five were scripture alone as our rule of life and conduct. Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and to the glory of God alone.

The five great alones or solas. And we're going to begin today by looking at the first of those, scripture alone. And we'll see something of why the Reformers insisted that scripture alone, without anything taken from it or anything added to it, is the rule of life and conduct for all human beings, not just for the church.

Because the Reformers insisted this is God's revelation of himself designed for human beings everywhere. And fitted for them to be the kind of people they should be in relation to God and to each other and to the world in which we live.

[4 : 28] So here is Paul writing to Timothy, one of the final letters to be written in the New Testament. And you find him here saying that as he's drawing Timothy's mind to what's going to happen in the last days.

That is a phrase which you find other times in the scripture in the New Testament. And it means not just the very few years, perhaps before Jesus returns.

The last days are essentially the days that were ushered in by the coming of Christ, first of all, and especially his ascension back to glory.

And the endowment of the church by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. From those times or that time onwards, we have entered into the last days. And within the last days, the Bible tells us certain things are going to be features of human behavior and human life.

And this is how Paul is saying to Timothy, understand this. You see, Timothy has to go on facing the challenge of presenting the gospel to the world of his day.

[5 : 38] And the world of his day was characterized by these things. Not just something that was going to happen hundreds of years after him. But it's characterized today by these same things.

As we face the challenge of living for God. And look at the list he's given us. We read through it at the beginning of the chapter. I'm not going to read through it. But it's an absolutely amazing list. Lovers of self.

Lovers of money. Proud. Arrogant. Abusive. Disobedient to parents. Ungrateful. Unholy. Unappeasable. Slanderous. Without self-control. And so on and so on.

And to counter that, Paul is reminding Timothy, you, however, in verse 10, have followed my teaching, my conduct. Paul is not drawing attention to himself. He's drawing attention to the things that he conveyed to Timothy in his teaching as an apostle.

An authoritative apostle of God. His teaching, his conduct, his aim in life, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfastness. How he endured persecutions.

[6 : 44] How the Lord rescued him. That's to counter the idea that somehow it's not a good idea to be a Christian in the midst of all of that list of characteristics of unholy people.

And then he comes to remind Timothy of the nature of Scripture and its importance and its benefits and its purpose. No, from childhood, he said, you've been acquainted with the sacred writings, with the Scriptures.

And that time, of course, was confined to the Old Testament, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. And then he comes to this wonderful definition, which has stood down through the centuries as a definition for us of both the nature of Scripture and the purpose of Scripture.

All Scripture is breathed out by God. That's its nature. It is God's Word. And then its purpose. And it is profitable. For what?

For teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. To what end? So that the man of God or the woman of God, the people of God, may be competent or complete, fitted out for every good work.

[8 : 07] So let's turn and look at these in more detail. These two headings. Firstly, the nature of Scripture, the Word of God. Notice what it says. All Scripture is breathed out by God.

That's a really interesting description and an important description. What is your Bible? It is the product of God's breath. What does that mean? It means that it's come directly from God through those that God used to write these books of the Bible.

But the origin is God Himself. The source is God Himself. Scripture, all Scripture, is breathed out by God. We sometimes give the word inspiration to the Bible.

The Bible is inspired. By which we really, it means that the Bible is the Word of God. It's come from Him. But it's more true to the meaning of this word.

Not so much inspired, but expiration. Breathed out. It's come from the mouth of God. Just like in the prophets of the Old Testament, you find them described in the Scriptures as saying to the people, Thus says the Lord.

[9 : 20] You find them describing their experience when God came to them and revealed to them what He wanted them to say and to convey to the people of Israel, of Judah, or Moses, whatever.

But there was God coming to take a human being and to say to that human being, This is what I require of you to say to these people. You're my messenger.

You're my spokesperson. You're my mouthpiece. I'm speaking through you. And that's the nature of the Bible. That's the nature of these people that God used to write these books of the Bible.

It is itself the product of God's breath. It's breathed out by God. It was through those people put into writing and then preserved for our benefit today and translations of it throughout the world, throughout history.

Let me just mention from 2 Peter. And in chapter 1 of 2 Peter, you'll find something that really expands a little on this. He says, you know, firstly, in verse 20, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

[10:31] Now, that doesn't mean that how we understand Scripture we are reliant on the church or on some particular experts. No, Peter is actually again dealing with the source of Scripture, where this word has come from.

Because he says, no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man. But men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Hugely important statement that. Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah spoke as a man. Isaiah spoke words relevant to his own age.

Isaiah spoke using his own mind and his own character, which is imparted to his writings. Isaiah spoke in terms of the culture of the day.

But Isaiah spoke as a man who was taken by God and carried by God, so that the words of Isaiah are the words of God. And you'll find that same thing of all the Bible writers.

[11:34] That's what it means. All Scripture is breathed out by God. They didn't lose their own individuality, their own style, their own circumstances. They weren't like robots. They weren't acting mechanically.

But they were being directed by God to put down the things which he would have them to put down as his word. Scripture is God breathed.

Then you'll see, you'll find someone, well, that's fine for Christians to believe. But how can you prove that this Bible is the word of God to the exclusion of all other writings?

Because people will say, what about the Koran? What about the writings relating to Buddhism?

What about other religions that have their own particular scriptures or writings?

How can you possibly say that this Bible is the word of God to the exclusion of all others? Well, there's a way of answering that.

[12:40] It's not going to satisfy everybody. But that's built into the answer. It's in the larger catechism. And question four. How doth it appear that the scriptures are the word of God?

And it says this. The scriptures manifest themselves to be the word of God by their majesty and purity, by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God, by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation.

And then it says this. And this is really the crux. But the Spirit of God, bearing witness by and with the scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God.

You don't come to a full persuasion that this Bible is the word of God, unless it is by the Spirit of God working by and with the word, not without the word, not independently of the word, but by and with the word of God.

In other words, somebody comes to you and says, well, okay, I value the scriptures. I really find it easy enough to say it's a book of worth and of value.

[14:04] I can even say that it has come from God, but I can't say it's exclusively the word of God. There are other equally valuable scriptures and writings that you can use in order to actually see God at work and come to know who God is and how people come to be saved.

No. That's not a view that's come from the work of the Spirit of God in anyone's heart.

And you can seriously doubt a person, don't care whether he's a bishop or an elder in a church or a member in the church or whatever status they have that says, yes, I respect the Bible, but I don't take it as the word of God.

You can actually really suspect that that person is not taught by the Spirit of God. Our persuasion, our full persuasion that this is the word of God is from the Holy Spirit, working by and with the word in our hearts.

And that's your persuasion today, isn't it, surely? This is God's word. Not part of it. Not God's word along with other words.

[15:19] This is God's breathed out scripture, this word. That's its nature. Therefore, as it is the word of God, there are three things that we can say are important in relation to it being the word of God.

And because it's the word of God, these things actually belong to it as properties. First of all, it is inerrant. It is the truth. It doesn't tell you something that's wrong.

It will not set you astray in your thoughts and in your conduct if you follow it. It's inerrant on all subjects. Some people will tell you, you see, well, I'm a Christian, but I don't believe everything that's in the Bible to actually be true.

I can't believe, for example, the things it says about miracles. I can't believe what it says about some Old Testament practices or some Old Testament beliefs. The Bible is or is not the word of God in its entirety.

It is breathed out by God. Therefore, it is God's word. Therefore, it is inerrant. And when it tells me that the people of God were led by Moses under God's direction through the Red Sea, which opened up before them by God's power, then that's the truth.

[16:30] When it tells me that David chose five smooth stones on his way to confronting Goliath in battle, well, that's the truth.

He didn't choose six. He didn't choose one. He chose five. That's what the Bible tells me. It's there as God's inerrant word. That's what God has specified. And the Bible tells me that the disciples, including Peter, went to the tomb and saw that it was empty and didn't find the body of the Lord there and found the grave clothes lying in a particular way.

That's the truth. That's not an invention of the church. That's not made up by the disciples. That's God's inerrant word. It's part of its nature that it is inerrant.

It's dependable. You see, that means it's entirely dependable. You don't just say, well, I can depend on it when it tells me about this, but not about history, not about these sort of difficult things to understand.

No, it is entirely all Scripture is God-breathed. The second feature of it is that it is authoritative. As God's word, this word is authoritative.

[17:45] It's alone authoritative. That's why Scripture alone was so important to the Reformers. Scripture alone, not Scripture plus certain writings of the church, not Scripture plus certain traditions down through history of the church that the Reformers had to confront in Roman Catholicism of its day.

Scripture alone, sola scriptura. It is authoritative. And when you say it's alone authoritative, don't lose sight of the fact that it is authoritative.

That means it's regulative of our conduct, of our thoughts, of our conscience. It regulates these. It regulates these fully. And again, that's against the idea of people today, even within the church, that say, well, you surely can't have just one standard.

One standard for human behavior, for society, for individuals. Well, why not if God says it? And God does say it.

[18:51] In terms of this being His authoritative word, you don't take anything from it in order to make it more palatable. You don't add something to it in order to make it more extensive in terms of what you feel or we feel it should contain.

It as it stands is authoritative. Your conscience today is bound exclusively by the Word of God. Your conscience is not bound by anything a minister tells you, by anything a session dictates, by anything a general assembly says.

The Pope is not Lord of the conscience. The Free Church Assembly is not Lord of the conscience. But God, through Scripture, is. And what Scripture calls a sin is sin.

And what Scripture does not refer to a sin cannot be insisted upon as sinful. It's authoritative. And it's authoritative fully.

And you see, what people need to understand and what you and I need to be taught again and again is that every facet of Scripture as God's authoritative word is designed for our good.

[20:13] The laws that it contains. The regulations it contains. The promises that bring us comfort. You can't pick and choose between them. They're all designed by this wonderful, loving, gracious God to be the rule of life and conduct for human beings.

It's inerrant. It's authoritative. And thirdly, it's sufficient. It's sufficient. The sufficiency of Scripture was so important to the Reformers.

You don't need more than it. You don't need less than it. You don't look for more as an authoritative, inerrant word. You don't look for less. It's the word of God in its entirety.

You see, every corruption of the Gospel, and really for the Reformers, the Gospel was at the heart of what they wanted to set forth and counter in the years of neglect that they had come to face. The Gospel, the way of salvation, how we come to be right with God. That was really at the crux, the crux of their concerns and of their presentation of the Bible as God's Word.

[21 : 23] Every corruption of the Gospel is by either adding to or taking away from Scripture. Every corruption is by adding to or taking away from Scripture something which Scripture says is or is not.

And it doesn't matter which group you look at, whether it's back to the days of the Reformers, the way the Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church as it then was, covering the whole of Europe under the dominance of the Pope, whether you think of that and the way that it was insisted on that his Word was final and the writings down through the years had to be placed along with Scripture and sometimes above Scripture.

No. The Reformers said, No, we're getting rid of all that. That's not what the Bible says. It is sufficient. I'm not recommending that you watch TV channels that have tele-evangelists and people like that.

But if you do, from time to time, dip into them. And it's always useful to dip into them just to reassure yourself of what is and isn't true. But you will find that the sufficiency of Scripture is something that is sadly ignored.

Why do you find so much of those meetings, these massive meetings, all of these hundreds, thousands of people coming together and being taken in by a false gospel, a gospel that tells you, for example, that God wants you to be wealthy, that God doesn't want you to be poor, that God wants you to get rid of all illnesses and wants you to be healthy all the time, that God's design for human life is riches in material ways, just as much as spiritual.

[23 : 13] Well, it certainly makes the tele-evangelists very rich multimillionaires, but it's very harmful to souls and leaves many people in despair. Why do they come to these conclusions and present that as if it were the gospel?

Well, because they've left the sufficiency of Scripture behind. They're adding to Scripture. They're bringing their own opinions to bear upon Scripture. That's why you find such things as atmosphere, technique, entertainment, entrepreneurship, things from the business world, things from the world, if you like, imported into what passes for church services and church meetings, leading to so-called miracles of healing that have been demonstrated in many occasions to have been false, and yet people still flock to them.

Why? Because they've left the sufficiency of Scripture behind. It's a flawed view of Scripture when you see anything contrary to its sufficiency.

It itself is God's sufficient Word. That doesn't mean you're always going to understand everything that happens in your life. It doesn't mean you turn to the Bible as if it was a textbook that you simply look through and find, ah, yes, that's exactly what I'm experiencing now, and this is the remedy. It doesn't work like that. Sometimes you can't understand God's dealings with us. But then you see, you always bring that back to the Bible, and you find, well, what do I do then?

[25 : 01] And you go to the likes of the book of Psalms, or to Paul himself, and find him saying, I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content, or therein to be content.

He doesn't say he understands everything God did to him, all these persecutions and sufferings, as he mentioned, that happened to him at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, which persecutions I endured. He's not boasting about his own ability there, because he says, out of them all, the Lord rescued me. I've come to understand, he says. And it's not about how I feel or how I understand.

It's all about my submission to God, my letting God control my life, and my being convinced that God's word is sufficient, even if it doesn't provide all the answers.

Still, it's the only thing, and the only thing I need to meet my situation. So, scripture is God's word, and as God's word, it's inerrant, it's authoritative, it's sufficient.

[26 : 11] That's the nature of God's word. I want to finish briefly with a second point, which was the purpose of scripture, which he goes on to say, it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

In other words, it's profitable, he means, you could say, he means, it's constructively helpful. It's what God has given us to be constructively useful to these ends.

And he mentions four. And again, they were important to the reformers as well in their emphasis on the gospel and on the Bible itself. Firstly, for teaching, profitable for teaching.

Our minds need to be informed and enlightened. and the catechism admirably sums up the purpose for the word of God, what the word of God actually is in itself and why he's given it to us. It's so that we would actually come to know what is to be believed concerning God and what duties God requires of man.

[27 : 27] What do the scriptures principally teach? Principally teach. Their main thrust. The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God.

Not the gods, not religion. God. And what duty God requires of man. That's what the scriptures are for.

For teaching. But secondly, for reproof. What is reproof? Well, reproof is basically rebuke. And that's one of the difficult ones, isn't it?

We readily acknowledge our need of being taught, our need of our minds being informed to understand what is true about God and the duty it requires of us, but it's much more difficult to then accept that we need reproof.

That we need to be rebuked by God for our sinful lifestyle. It's not merely a rebuking. Reproof is a warning about the wrong path.

[28 : 36] Imagine where you and I would be if God hadn't sent us this word. If we depended on our own ideas, on our own understanding on human philosophy, imagine what it would be like if a mother saw a toddler walking towards the cliff tops.

I didn't bother to warn that child of where it was headed. That's what the word of God does for us. It tells us, look, as a sinner, this is what you are, this is where you're heading. this is what eternity will be for you unless you turn from that way.

That's what the scripture does. That's what the scripture's purpose is. It's for reproof. It's in order to warn us regarding the wrong path that we're on by nature as sinners and ourselves.

But then you see, it's also for correction. Because God doesn't do the business simply of shouting out warnings to us about where we're going as sinners, what path we are on.

[29 : 45] Alongside of that you find God showing us the right way and emphasizing the right way and appealing to us to come into the right way. That's what the gospel is about. The gospel doesn't just say if you die without Christ you'll go to hell.

It does say that. But his primary emphasis is if you turn from that way then you will be saved. That's God saying to us yes you're on the wrong way but you don't need to stay there.

I have a right way for you. I have the way the truth and the life in Jesus. And the scriptures are profitable for correction.

For bringing us into the right way. And fourthly for training in righteousness. Once we're in the right way God doesn't leave us then to ourselves.

The scripture isn't used by God simply to bring us to know himself. It isn't there just to warn us from the wrong way and correct that and bring us into the right way.

[30 : 53] It continues to be of profit and of use to us for training in righteousness. The word training there is really a family word. It's the kind of thing that's associated with bringing up children and shaping children's lives in a positive and good way.

And as used here with that sort of meaning but brought into the spiritual area the spiritual meaning of it being that God through scripture trains us for righteousness or in righteousness.

he brings about a certain shape to our lives. He doesn't just bring us into the right way and leave us the way we were. It's what's called sanctification or bringing us to be like Jesus himself because that's God's end.

That's God's intended end in our redemption and our salvation. So the nature of scripture and the purpose of scripture these four points I've just mentioned them very briefly but then it mentions the end result as well.

So that the man of God may be competent equipped for every good work. May be complete may be fitted out.

[32 : 15] You think of a tradesman or tradeswoman and when they're doing their apprenticeship they're issued with a set of tools perhaps and they learn how to use them. Whether it's training in that respect or training in nursing or medicine whatever it is and teaching you go through a period of training you're given your resources you're taught how to use them and you become competent hopefully you become competent to use them in a profitable way for others as well.

Well he's saying here this is so that the man of God may be fitted out may be competent may be made complete may know how to use the things that God provides for every good work he says every good work.

Now the reformers emphasized that we were not we'll come to this one we'll come to sola fide which is by faith alone not by works the reformers emphasized we're not saved through good works or by good works but they also emphasized a Christian is one committed to good works as the product of a life that's been changed by God and indeed when Paul was writing to the Ephesians in chapter 2 this is what he said he's talking there about you remember what they once were as sinners and dead and so on brought to life by God in Christ and then he says so he says in verse 10 we are he says saved by grace this is not your own doing it's the gift of God for we are his workmanship we as Christians are the workmanship of God created in Christ Jesus for good works don't accept the idea at all that a

Christian is somebody who really has little time for good works the practical side of the Christian life is of huge importance how else can it be seen that we are Christians if we're not engaged in good works works of helpfulness to one another and to others as well now you can see from all of that and I've just dealt with very briefly today you can see from all of that I hope why so much emphasis is given today to removing the Bible from public life removing the Bible from our school teaching removing the Bible from university campuses from Christian unions removing the Bible indeed increasingly from church services removing the preaching side of it at least or providing a stump of a Bible perhaps instead of the whole thing secularists and humanists and atheists and liberals they want to remove the

Bible not because they don't know what it does but because they do because they know that this Bible is a guide to young people and becomes a staff for them in their old age because they appreciate that this Bible wounds in order to heal that this Bible condemns in order to bring acquittal in salvation in Christ that this Bible shows a sinner what he or she is and that this Bible leads that sinner to a Savior to the Savior Jesus Christ because they know from Christian testimony that this Bible is a comfort to us through life and nurtures our hope for eternity all scripture is God's a God breathed and is profitable to those ends friends don't allow the Bible to be removed from public life let's pray

[36 : 39] Lord our God we thank you for the scriptures for the fact that these scriptures are your word that you are revealed to us in them and through them we thank you for the purpose for which you have given us the scriptures for the way that you use them in the life and experience of your people make us thankful increasingly oh Lord that we have the freedom to use our Bibles hear us now we pray for Jesus sake amen we're going to conclude again singing in Psalm 119 verses 129 to 136 that's in the St.

Psalms version page 165 verses 129 to 136 the tune is rocking him your statutes Lord are wonderful so I obey them from my heart your words as they unfold give light and truth to simple minds in parts 119 these verses in conclusion you you statutes Lord are wonderful so I will fit them from my heart and to inspire and forgive light and truth to simple minds and hearts.

With open mouth I've had done here to those the lost that you proclaim.

Show me the mercy you extend to those who love and praise your name.

Direct my footsteps in your heart Let sin not hold me in its sway Romance, oppression sets me free That your commands I may obey Upon yourself unshine your face Teach me the statutes you have made My life shed streams of better tears

[40 : 12] Because your law is not obey If you'll let me get to the main door, please, after the benediction.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen. Thank you Thank you