

Sola Scriptura – Living by Scripture Alone
Psalm 119:105-112, 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Friends, a few years ago someone told me they were relieved when Valleyview was able to start displaying the scripture readings up on the screen and they didn't need to use a bible to follow along.

The reason was that since we don't have pews in the sanctuary which normally have a book rack on the back where you can keep the bible – they had no respectful place to put the bible when they finished reading it.

They didn't feel it was respectful to lay it on the seat next to you – since that was where your behind sat... and the only other option was to lay the Word of God down on the floor and that just felt wrong to them as well.

This was a big issue for them and so when they no longer had to worry about how to treat the bible respectfully – they were very relieved.

And this got me thinking why didn't I feel this way about where to store a bible? It didn't make a difference to me whether it was on the seat or left on the floor.

But, a couple years ago I had a very old bible, and it was beat up, falling apart, pages were ripped and missing, it just wasn't usable anymore – so... what should I do with it?

Throw it in the garbage? Recycle it? I really didn't know what to do – it didn't feel right to put it in the garbage or throw it away.

And so I ask you this morning – friends, how do you treat the bible? What's your attitude towards the scriptures and how do you handle them – this of course includes how you read, interpret and apply the scriptures... and, do you acknowledge the authority of the scriptures?

But more importantly friends, where did you pick all this up? And, since we are preparing and training to make disciples – to whom are you passing it on?

Jesus said *“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

And a large part of how we teach people to obey Jesus' commands is through teaching them to read the scriptures and... apply them to their lives – especially the parts of scripture which tell the story of Jesus.

And as we do that, we pass on what we have picked up, to those we are discipling.

And it would appear that we are in good company in doing so, because in 1 Corinthians 15:3 the Apostle Paul writes *“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”*

And Paul writes to Timothy and says *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you 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.”* (1 Tim 3:14-15)

So, we can see a pattern in both passages where someone passes on the teaching of the scriptures to their disciple and then in turn they pass that on to others, this is what Paul did for the Corinthians and what He was encouraging Pastor Timothy to do for his congregation.

And it is what we do for those we are discipling.

We need to pass on the teachings of scripture so that those we are discipling are made wise for salvation in Jesus Christ, we must teach them that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

So – how would you do this? Would you teach people to read scripture starting with the gospel of John first?

Would you start by going right to the Easter story – first thing, because in 1 Cor 15:3 Paul says that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is *“of first importance.”* And please note you would be doing that out of obedience to scripture – which says something about how you believe Scripture is authoritative.

Or, would you take them to the Old Testament to show them how to become wise for salvation in Christ?

Because that’s what Paul is actually referring to when he speaks about the Holy Scriptures in 1 Timothy 3 and In 1 Corinthians 15. The New Testament, as we know it, was not in existence when Paul was writing these letters – the Scriptures to which He refers are the Old Testament.

And making this distinction also says something about how you approach and interpret and apply the scriptures.

And having made this distinction friends, it makes me wonder would we be able to disciple someone to live as a Christian with just the Old Testament for reference?

That’s what Pastor Timothy had to do for his congregation – and Paul encouraged him in this task by saying that the Old Testament *“is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Now if this is a radical new thought for you about the scriptures, and you’ve never thought that the Old Testament actually contained the gospel about salvation in Jesus – again think about it... Where did you pick that up?

Someone passed that along to you and you would likely pass that along to someone else...

So – as we are being equipped to make disciples we need to evaluate what we are going to pass on to others about the

scriptures – because as we’ve been saying about the fruit of the disciple making process is that *“the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”*

And friends if we pass on one thing about the scriptures to our children and those in our community as we disciple them it must be Sola Scriptura – by scripture alone.

We have received Sola Scriptura from those who worked to reform the Medieval Catholic Church in the 1500’s – Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and those who came afterwards, and we must reclaim what we have received – understand it, and pass it on to those who will come after us.

And friends it’s hard to overstate the importance of this – because all the other Sola’s... Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria – are formed by what comes to us in the scriptures.

And we say it is by Grace Alone, by Faith Alone, by Christ Alone and to God’s Glory Alone - to the exclusion of adding

on unnecessary traditions or false teachings – only because the scripture alone has the authority as being the Word of God.

Sola Scriptura is about the authority which the scriptures have, so that they can say to us *“thus sayeth the Lord – this is the way to salvation – this is the way you must live”*

The Reformers used Sola Scriptura to counter the claims of the Medieval Catholic Church that the Church had the final say on salvation and how one ought to live, that the Pope had the final authority to make infallible statements on behalf of God...

They said no! The way to salvation and the appropriate response we must make is revealed by God through Scripture alone, it is the final authority on such matters.

So Presbyterians have a history of saying that scripture is the only rule for faith and life, and at Valleyview we claim that

history and work to make sure all that we do is based on the authority of scripture alone.

And that's good news friends because there are so many conflicting messages these days about who has the final authority.

We've already addressed religious leaders... so what about Dr. Phil, or Dr. Oz and the medical community? What about expert scholars and scientists, like astrophysicists who investigate the origins of the universe... Is it the government? The Supreme Court? What about ourselves, with all our inalienable rights and privileges, or our experiences?

Who has final authority?

Friends, in the face of all these competing and confusing and even contradicting claims to authority Sola Scriptura is refreshingly simple... but let us not make it simplistic

Living by Scripture Alone does not mean that you on your own have the authority to interpret and apply verses from bible in whatever manner you want. That's taking the authority located in scripture and saying that it originates from yourself.

If you notice Paul doesn't say to Timothy search the Holy Scriptures so that you can come up with an interpretation that leads to salvation... in fact Jesus himself rebuked the Jewish leader for doing this this.

John 5:39-40 Jesus says *"You study the Scriptures [Old Testament] diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."*

Friends, Sola Scriptura means that we put ourselves under the authority of the scriptures alone so that they reveal the way to salvation for us. Paul's point is that it is the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise for salvation in Christ, not our interpretation of them.

Now again – this is refreshingly simple – since today it seems that everything is about our approach to scripture and how we interpret it and we know that it is possible to manipulate scripture to make it say and support whatever we want.

It is wonderful to be able to approach scripture alone and simply trust that we can hear it and read it without any additional scholarly knowledge or study by power of the Holy Spirit the scriptures can make us wise for salvation in Christ - Amen!

However – let us be careful we do not make this simplistic. This is not grounds for anyone to avoid scholarly activity, further study or the task of developing theology, nor does it justify the criticism those who do so by saying “*well... I just read the bible.*”

Friends, if the scriptures are to be useful to us in the process of making disciples - so that we may, as Paul says, teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness so that people are thoroughly equipped for every good work – we must do more

than just submit to the scriptures, we must use them for discipling others and that means studying and developing guidelines for reading, interpreting and using them as a basis for theology and so on, and there are good ways to do this and bad ways to do this.

That’s why in Paul’s second letter to Pastor Timothy he encourages him to “*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who **correctly handles the word of truth.***” (2 Tim 2:15)

So even though we may have been made wise for Salvation by the scriptures we still need to study and train so that we don’t incorrectly handle the word of truth.

Remember the Jewish leaders who were rebuked by Jesus because they mishandled God’s word – they handled and used the scriptures in a way which prevented them from seeing that the Law and the Prophets testified about Jesus.

Paul himself was one of those leaders before the Risen Lord Jesus confronted him in person on the road to Damascus – so he knew all about the difference between handling the word of truth correctly and incorrectly.

So friends, Sola Scriptura is only Sola Scriptura in so far as we understand and work with the scriptures – both Old and New Testaments in a way that points to salvation in Jesus Christ.

In fact that is why we have a New Testament – it is the writings of the Apostles which taught and explained to the new believers how the Old Testament makes us wise for salvation in Christ.

So the New Testament is in the Old Testament but its concealed... and the Old Testament is in the New Testament where it's revealed!

Bringing both the Old and New Testament together as they point to, and are fulfilled in Jesus Christ is how we handle the word of truth correctly – and be warned friends, there are

plenty of people who do not this, so whatever you hear people teaching from the scriptures test it to make sure they are handling it correctly.

And lastly friends, Sola Scriptura means that the scriptures alone, as they point to and reveal Christ, function as the corrective lenses which can restore the way in which sin has distorted our vision of reality, and through which we can observe and study God's Creation correctly,

If we want to have a clear and accurate view of the reality in which we live we need to allow the scriptures to shape how we view the world.

And this is possible because – as we handle the word of truth correctly – we will come to realize that the Word of salvation which God speaks to us in Jesus Christ is the same Word referred to in Psalm 119 where the Psalmist says....

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your

righteous laws. I have suffered much; preserve my life, Lord, according to your word"

And that Word, friends, is the same Word by which God created the reality in which we live and exist.

That's why the gospel of John starts out *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."* (John 1:1-3)

And John continues on in vs. 10 *"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him."*

Or better translated perhaps would be to say "He was in the cosmos – the beautiful arrangement, and though the beautiful arrangement was made through him, the beautiful arrangement did not recognize him"

Why – because Sin has affected this beautiful arrangement and our ability to see and understand the Word of God for it and in it.

No matter how intelligent, sophisticated, civilized or insightful we might be - sin keeps us from fully comprehending God's Word in and for His creation – and so we are disobedient and rebellious.

And John continues in vs 11 *"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"*

So John is now talking about the nation of Israel – the people with whom God made a covenant – and so in that covenant the Word of God came to them in the Law of Moses. The Law was there to help Israel see and respond to God's Word, to obey it and thus live by it.

So the Law of Moses was the Word of God by which all things were created... and for those who received it – it brought life and light – they became Children of God... and that was God’s intention for Israel, that they would be light to the nations around them (Isaiah 51:4)

Thus Psalm 119:105 states *“Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”* The Word of God in the Law of Moses was good and Psalm 119 is 176 verses of praise and love for the life giving Word of God as it is expressed in the Law of Moses.

But unfortunately – in spite of the light and life that was in the law of Moses, God’s people ended up rejecting God’s Word, as John says He came to his own but they did not receive him.

In this we discover and learn that Sin so profoundly affects us that we flee from God – even when He comes to us and gives instruction on how to respond to His Word. Something deeper, more profound is needed in order for God’s Word to bring forth the right response from humanity.

So John says *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John1:14)*

The Word becomes human so that the right response to God’s Word is offered by the Word himself.

So do you see how John reveals the Old Testament in the New Testament here and they point to Jesus Christ – the Word in the flesh, the Word in the Law and the Word of Creation.

Friends – I hope you are experiencing being made wise for salvation as we see how scripture points to this three-fold Word of God.

God’s Word became flesh in Jesus Christ who died for our sins, was resurrected, ascended and sent us His Holy Spirit. By His Spirit we are enabled to obey the Word of God as the new Law written on our hearts, and with the Word of God in and on our hearts we begin to be able to recognize and respond to the Word of God in and for His creation and how that is to govern our lives.

And Sola Scripture means that we come to this revelation by scripture alone. We won't discover it by studying the creation, we won't arrive at it by trying to be good moral people – scripture alone reveals it to us as it points us to Jesus Christ.

This is how scripture functions as the only rule for our faith... and our lives.

It is the only pair of lenses by which we come to accurately view and understand this world and our place and role in it, and this is what we must be passing on to those whom we are discipling.

This is how we can teach them to obey everything that Christ – the Word of God – has commanded us.

Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone has God's authority, Scripture alone points us to Jesus Christ, Scripture alone is the corrective lens for our distorted vision.

This is what I have received, this is what I pass on to you, this is what we pass on to those we disciple...

Scripture alone! To God alone be the glory. Amen