

Theology for Life

Volume 10 | Issue 1 | Spring 2023

A photograph of a person reading a Bible in a church setting. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is holding the Bible open. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other people in a church. The text "Sola Scriptura" is overlaid in a light blue, cursive font.

Sola Scriptura.

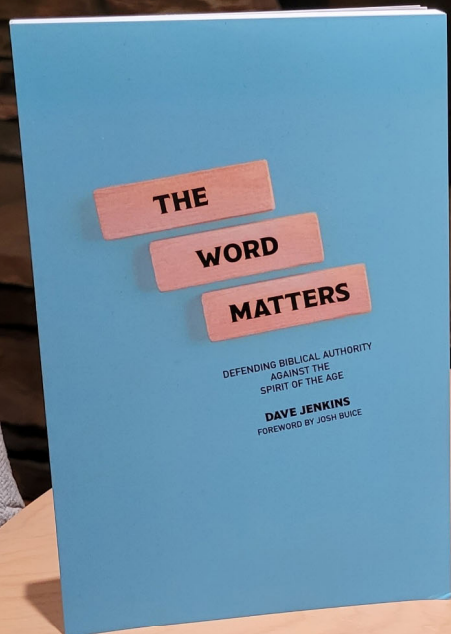
Biblical Truth

FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

Inside this Issue...

- **Should Protestants Use Tradition?**
- ***Sola Scriptura* and Roman Catholicism**
- ***Sola Scriptura* and Parenting**
- ***Sola Scriptura* and the New Apostolic Reformation**

In ***The Word Matters***, Dave Jenkins take readers by the hand and helps them understand how serious the issue of biblical authority is and how the Bible is under attack so that they can stand with confidence on the Word of God.

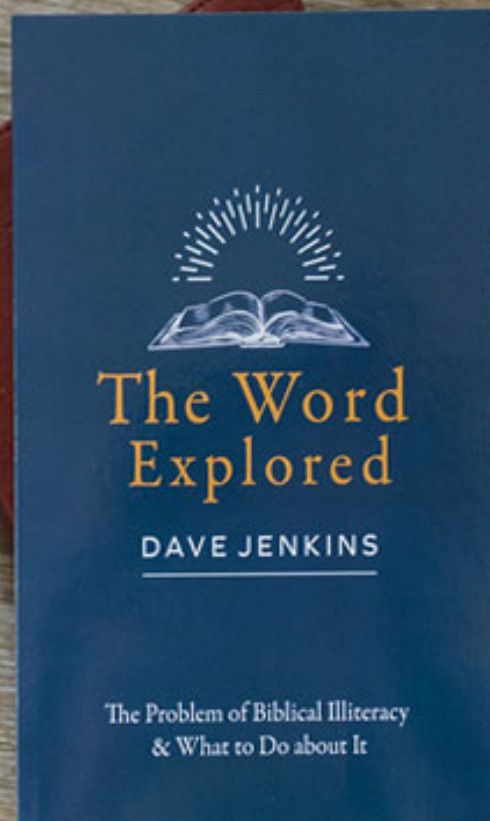


The Word Matters

DEFENDING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE



Grow in your relationship with God!



*The Word Explored:
The Problem of
Biblical Illiteracy &
What to Do about It*
is an easy-to-read,
biblically-based work
for lay-people and
pastors alike.



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Editor's Corner

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Dave Jenkins

CONTENT EDITOR

Sarah Jenkins

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Sarah Jenkins

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Please contact dave@servantsofgrace.org.

As we study the subject of the *Sola Scriptura* in this issue of *Theology for Life*, it could be argued that there is no greater topic for us to consider. For over 25 years I've been studying this topic, and since my teenage years, I've seen many movements come and go, some of which have sought to be helpful to the Church and others that have harmed her.

Few doctrines are as least understood and yet more taught than the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* today. That is quite the statement. While space and time constraints prohibit a person from understanding everything about it, one should review the statistics on biblical and theological illiteracy put out by Lifeway Research, the American Bible Society, and the Worldview Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Also, check out the *State of Theology* that was published last summer by Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research.

In the world today, we are seeing a multi-pronged assault on the doctrine of Scripture—from the New Apostolic Reformation, with its Passion “Translation” (which, even in the most generous sense, cannot be considered a paraphrase), to the assault by the growing tide of homosexuality, “gay Christianity”, transgenderism, gender pronouns, etc., both inside and outside the Church.

Further, the doctrine of Scripture is under assault by those who profess to believe what the Church has always taught concerning the Bible, but by their own teaching and ministry, undermine not only the authority but also the sufficiency of Scripture, either by their teaching or practice. Understanding what *Sola Scriptura* is and why it matters is the necessity of the hour.

Sola Scriptura means that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, and authoritative. Scripture is the only way we can know God. God has revealed Himself in Scripture from the very first words in the first sentence of Genesis 1 to the last word in the last sentence in Revelation

22. Throughout Scripture, we discover from beginning to end, and everywhere in-between, the person and work of Jesus Christ, both in/through His World and among His people.

We also see an assault on *Sola Scriptura* in both doctrine and practice. Today, many think they need to have dreams and visions in order to hear from God (apart from Scripture). Yet, today we have the Bible (the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments) and the canon is closed. We are taught in the Word to test all things in accordance with Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21). These very people who want you to believe you need dreams, visions, and more, undermine the sufficiency of Scripture. Scripture is for every phase and stage of our lives. Our lives and ministries are not about how many people we reach on social media or how many people hear (or read) our teachings, etc. We must understand how Scripture is sufficient for every aspect of the Christian life, and how this affects ministry.

The Scriptures are the standard for a Christian's life and ministry. This means that whether you are a parent, a blogger, an author, a podcaster, a pastor/teacher, a lawyer, a doctor, a chef, or some other vocation, you are to be faithful to the Lord and to His Word.

All of this is why we have put together this issue of *Theology for Life* on the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. In the pages of this issue, you will discover what *Sola Scriptura* is and why it is essential to the Christian faith. Along the way, you will discover how it is under attack. But be encouraged. The Word promises that it will not return void (Isaiah 55:11). The Scripture will cut and pierce the heart of men (Hebrews 4:12). The Holy Spirit aims to take the Word as we read and hear it, and bring comfort and conviction.

I hope as you read the pages of this magazine, you will be blessed, encouraged, and equipped in and through the Word. The challenges we face are not insurmountable. Be encouraged. The Lord is at work through His Word, and the Holy Spirit takes the faithful preaching and teaching of Scripture and drives it further and deeper into our lives. Be faithful to the Word. The Lord is building His Church. He is sovereign over the Church and all of Creation. His rule extends from the beginning to the end, and everywhere in between.

Christian, in an age of "post-truth", where people think they can believe whatever they want and do whatever they want, may we stand on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and tell others of the glories of Christ, as shown in the Word.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

***Sola Scriptura* and Using the Bible**

By Jacob Tanner

***Sola Scriptura* simply teaches that Scripture alone is our sufficient and supreme authority in matters of faith and practice.** This is different, however, than saying that we believe in “*Solo Scriptura*”. *Solo Scriptura* is the belief that Scripture is our *only* authority, ever. *Sola Scriptura*, however, is the belief that there does, in fact, exist *lesser* authorities.

This means, at a very basic level, that the Christian who practices *Sola Scriptura* is not left to study his/her Bible alone or walk through this life with *only* the Bible in hand, while divorced from the many other helps of this life. On the contrary, God has blessed the Church at large with several helps and lesser au-



thorities that help us to study, understand, and use the Bible in our day-to-day lives.

This article will simply seek to do one thing: List various ways (though not exhaustive) that the Christian, trusting in *Sola Scriptura*, can learn to rightly interpret and use the Bible.

One: The Christian Must be Filled with the Holy Spirit to Understand the Bible

This may seem almost an unnecessary step to include, but the truth is that the unregenerate cannot really begin to comprehend or understand the Scriptures. Someone unsaved may be able to act like a parrot and repeat particular teachings or doctrines they have learned elsewhere, but the mark of genuine understanding and knowledge, when it comes to Scripture, is knowing and loving Jesus and the truth of His Word. Such knowledge and love simply cannot be possible apart from faith, repentance, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in John 16:13-15:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is, genuinely, the first step to being able to interpret, understand, and use the Bible rightly. Subsequently, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit helps us to recognize all truth as God’s truth, no matter where we find it, which may help us to interpret Scripture better.

Two: The Christian Must Interpret Scripture with Scripture

It seems a simple thing to do, yet it is the most important step to understanding the Bible. Take, for example, just about any other book in existence. If

you want to understand its plot, characters, and set pieces, do you open the book to any old page and start reading, hoping to piece it all together? Of course not! Books are read from beginning to end in order to make sure that the reader really understands and pieces together the plot as intended by the author.

So it is with God's Word. We can only really begin to understand the Bible when we interpret Scripture with Scripture. We must compare the end to the beginning and the beginning to the end. Revelation 22 only really begins to make sense in light of Genesis 1, and everything else that comes in between.

The opposite also holds true; to understand why God created all things in Genesis, one needs to see the work of God through the Old Testament Prophets, the salvific work of Jesus on display in the Gospel accounts, and the finale of historical redemption towards which God is working, before He physically resurrects us and makes a new Earth and Heavens for us to dwell with Him forevermore in Revelation. This is why the Apostle Peter wrote:

“The problem is that we forget the truth that no man is an island unto himself.”

“And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Because all of Scripture was breathed by the Holy Spirit and produced by the will of God, all of it is important. It cannot be read, or understood, with only a few pieces in view. Every serious student of Scripture, and, indeed, every Chris-

tian, ought to make it their goal to read and study the *whole* Bible.

Three: The Christian Must Read and Listen to Expository Sermons

There are some Christians who are well-meaning enough when it comes to *Sola Scriptura*, but completely misunderstand the doctrine. They believe that, literally, all they need is themselves and their Bibles, and they will guide themselves into all truth.

We know, however, that this cannot be. First of all, as we already saw, we need the Holy Spirit. He is the one who grants us illumination and understanding of the Scriptures. So, the act of interpreting Scripture is, from the first step, decidedly *not* an act done in seclusion. We need God to lead us.

The problem is that we forget the truth that no man is an island unto himself. No man is perfect. We think ourselves so brilliant that any outside help is pointless, but the reality is that no man can master *every single doctrine himself*. For this reason, God has given us many helps, and one of the primary helps comes from those whom God has equipped to teach His Word. Consider Ephesians 4:11-16:

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Pastors, preachers, and teachers serve the purpose of helping us to mature in the faith through careful expositions of God's Word. It is true that all are called to study God's Word, as 2 Timothy 2:15 makes clear: "*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*" However, not all have the same giftings and abilities. God has especially equipped our pastors to teach us God's Word so that we can learn to become better students, interpreters, and appliers of the Bible in our own lives and homes.

This means, however, that the best sort of preaching, teaching, and commentary writing that we can seek to receive comes from those who utilize *exposi-*

“One of the greatest helps afforded through a careful study of Church history is that the Christian is guarded from a plethora of errors and heresies...”

tory methods. These methods, in short, seek to understand God's Word, verse-by-verse, by utilizing historical, grammatical, and Christological methods to find the genuine meaning of God's Word, and then apply it to our own lives in extremely practical ways.

This is the very practice of the early Church that we see in Scripture. When Paul departed from the Ephesians, he declared to them that he "*did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27). Declaring the whole counsel of God's Word requires expositional, verse-by-verse preaching, rather than topical sermons and hobby horses.

Four: The Christian Must Make Use of Church History, Creeds, and Systematics

Sola Scriptura still sees Scripture as the final authority, even as the Christian seeks to make certain that their interpretation and practices align with the major

orthodox positions of Church history. One of the greatest helps afforded through a careful study of Church history is that the Christian is guarded from a plethora of errors and heresies that our spiritual ancestors have had to already walk through and combat themselves. Consider something like Christology—the study of Christ. What Christian today, left to their own devices, can formulate a complete, robust, biblical, and orthodox view of Christology totally on their own? Given many decades, perhaps some would be able to do it. Probably most would veer off into some heresy or another without knowing it. But the beauty of Church history is that, with decidedly less than decades of study, we can be helped to formulate that same complete, robust, biblical, and orthodox view of Christology that would have taken us decades on our own.

“If you were asked to define the Trinity, how would you do it?”

Creeds often act in the same way. If you were asked to define the Trinity, how would you do it? Could you even begin to do so on your own? But with something like the Athanasius Creed, we are helped to rightly interpret the Scriptures so that we can then begin to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity. Systematics is, to some extent, the final step in our practice of *Sola Scriptura* biblical interpretation and practice, but a necessary one, all the same. As we move from Biblical theology to historical theology, and finally to systematic theology, we find that it is extraordinarily helpful to formulate doctrines into carefully designated and systematized orders.

For example, we can take texts like John 10:28-30, Romans 8:29-39, and Philippians 1:6 (amongst others), and place all these texts under the heading

“Perseverance of the Saints”. While we should exercise some caution in trying to make sure that we don’t begin to read Scripture through the interpretive lens of systematics *only*, carefully constructed systematic theology helps us to succinctly summarize our faith to others in biblically meaningful ways.

As we follow these steps, we continue to recognize this one simple truth: Scripture alone, as God’s Word to us, is our final authority. Our goal is to simply understand it and apply it rightly to our lives for the glory of God alone. All else, including the tools we use to do so, are subject to Scripture’s final authority.

Should Protestants Use Tradition?

By Bill Farley



I grew up Roman Catholic. We practiced many unbiblical traditions. For example, I prayed to St. Joseph. He was the patron saint that helped people find things that were lost. We said the rosary as a family around the dinner table every evening during lent. My father

had a statue of Mary in our backyard—we venerated her. We even believed that she was a co-mediatrix with Christ. We believed in Purgatory—in effect, a temporary hell—a place where people go after death to propitiate God’s wrath by suffering for their own sin so that they can eventually go to heaven.

None of these are mentioned in the Bible. Even worse, they actually *contradict* the Bible. For example, the Bible forbids praying to the dead. It makes no mention of purgatory; just the opposite—Christ’s work on the cross totally pro-

pitiated God's wrath. Therefore, purgatory is a tacit rejection of Christ's finished work. And the Bible specifically repudiates Mary as a co-mediatrix.

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

In addition, based on tradition, and in direct contradiction to the Bible, Catholics teach that we are justified by "infused righteousness". In other words, we get right with God through good works. For Catholics this means obedience to Catholic church hierarchy and the frequent reception of the sacraments. The Bible teaches otherwise:

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." (Romans 3:21-22, 28).

If you are Protestant, and you consider the Bible the final authority in doctrine and discernment, you will find all the above abhorrent. Where do ideas like this come from? They occur when we place tradition on the same level with Scripture. Pope Benedict, who died on December 31, 2022, had a high view of Scripture, but it was his *definition* of Scripture that was the problem:

"We must understand [Benedict's] true position. In his 2010 Exhortation Verbum Domini, he claimed that the Word of God "precedes and exceeds sacred Scripture; nonetheless Scripture, as inspired by God, contains the divine word." According to him, the Bible is the Word of God in the sense that it contains the Word."

In other words, "Scripture" is bigger than the Bible. It includes church tradition. In fact, for Catholics, church tradition *is a form of Scripture*. Therefore, in many cases it cancels or changes clear biblical teaching.

This position, and all the doctrinal shipwrecks that followed, were the primary motivation for the 16th century Protestant Reformation. "Sola Scriptura",

the belief that the Bible is the *final authority* in all matter of faith and practice, was the rallying cry of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and the other Magisterial Reformers.

Pope Benedict believed the Bible “contains the Word.” What did he mean? He meant that not all of the Bible is the word of God, but you can find God’s Word *in* the Bible. Only some parts of the Bible are the “Word of God”.

“Although many are not in the Bible, they do not oppose the Bible or change its teachings.”

Of course, this terminates in the rule of human reason, not divine revelation. It is just a restatement of Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy. To further explain, here is the Roman Catholic catechism on this important subject.

“The [Roman] Church...to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.’”

Protestant Tradition?

What about Protestants? What is our relation to tradition? Because of these errors, do we reject *all* tradition? Are we also enslaved by unbiblical traditions? If so, are there traditions without specific biblical warrant that are helpful? If so, how?

First, we need to be reminded that Protestants also follow many traditions. Although many are not in the Bible, they do not oppose the Bible or change its teachings. For example, the Bible does not tell us to meet on Sunday mornings at 10 AM, sing three songs, and then listen to 40 minutes of teaching.

It commands us to meet regularly, and it commands preaching and singing, but how and when we do that is mostly a matter of church tradition. Wedding rings, altar calls, the “sinner’s prayer”, and the phrase “personal relationship with Jesus” are not in the Bible either. But these traditions are acceptable because they don’t contradict the Bible.

Do Protestants, like Catholics, have traditions that contradict Scripture? How about the prohibition of alcoholic beverages? Yes, drunkenness is wrong, but alcohol is *not* inherently evil. At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus turned enough water into wine to fill 180 gallons (900 fifths of alcohol).

Tradition and Biblical Interpretation

Should Protestants allow tradition to help us interpret the Bible? Yes, we should. None of us are islands unto ourselves. We stand on the shoulders of a millennia of great Christian thinkers. Humility compels us to consult them. It motivates us to check our doctrinal conclusions against the traditional teaching of the Church—a body of doctrine that has accumulated over the centuries, and which our best creeds summarize. The 17th century Westminster Confession of Faith is a good example. But even the WCF needs to be constantly checked against scripture.

The guiding principle is simple and basic: unlike Roman Catholics, we don’t view tradition as Scripture. It is subordinate to, and under the heel of Scripture. Where there is a conflict, Scripture trumps the teaching of our forefathers. Make it your habit to test *every* doctrine by a clear appeal to Scripture.

Conclusion

Protestants do not place tradition on the same level as Scripture—just the opposite. Scripture is lord over tradition; it governs and rules it. With this principle in mind, we can safely use and enjoy liturgical traditions that do not contra-

dict Scripture. We can also safely appropriate the vast corpus of good biblical interpretation handed down to us by our forefathers. *Sola Scriptura!*

References:

- i. "Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022): His Life and Legacy", Leonardo De Chirico, Dec. 21, 2022, *The Gospel Coalition*, italics mine.
- ii. Quoted from Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*, Second Edition (p. 154). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

***Sola Scriptura* and Discipleship**

By Justin Huffman



Hand-in-hand with *Sola Scriptura*—which insists that Scripture alone is to be our rule of faith and practice—is the doctrine of the unity of Scripture, which contends that Scripture presents us

with faultless (and therefore harmonious) truth. This may seem at first glance to be a heady or academic doctrine, but in reality, our view of Scripture has profound implications for all of life. Scripture and discipleship go hand-in-hand. What we believe about God's Word inevitably shapes how we think and live as Christians.

God's Word is Unbreakable

The apostle Paul famously claims in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." According to Paul, all scripture is divinely inspired, although God used distinct and individual human authors to record it. This means all of Scripture is an accurate expression of the thoughts of God Himself.

When we say, then, that God's Word is "unified" or "harmonious", we are ultimately reflecting the necessary conclusion of 2 Timothy 3:16: if Scripture is all God-breathed, then it must be *just as unified as God is unified* in His thinking and actions. God is not confused, does not change His mind, does not ever need to grow in understanding because He knows everything and has all wisdom. Therefore, when God speaks in all of Scripture, all of Scripture will agree with itself because God does not ever disagree with Himself.

This unity of Scripture is expressed nowhere more clearly than in the declaration of Jesus in John 10:35 that "Scripture cannot be broken." Jesus, in context, is making a practical point by quoting from the Psalms—and His point is that every word of Scripture is trustworthy; that what it says in one place will agree with what it says in another place. Or, in this specific instance, what Jesus Himself is saying in claiming to be God's Son perfectly agrees with God's Words in the Old Testament! Let's consider, then, the implications of Jesus' statement that the Scripture is unified and unbreakable.

The Word of God is a Unified and Faultless Body of Truth

What does Jesus mean when He says that Scripture cannot be broken? He means that God's Word cannot be properly taught or accepted in parts, separate from the whole. Scripture cannot be broken up in order to pit one verse or truth against another. They all stand or fall together.

It might be helpful to consider this principle by means of a word picture. The same word "broken" that Jesus uses in John 10:35 is also found in the Book of Acts when a congregation "broke up" after a meeting (13:43). In other words, each person went his or her own way, without regard to the others in the crowd.

Jesus insists that Scripture is not like this—not a single verse goes astray from the rest or expresses truth apart from the rest. All of Scripture stands together, all of Scripture stays together.

What does this reality have to do with discipleship, with everyday Christian living? William Still was used greatly in the last half of the 20th century to bring evangelicalism back in Scotland by simply preaching verse-by-verse through the Bible. William Still addresses other ministers directly in his book *The Work of the Pastor*, and there he reminds us, "What people need is the whole Christ; to get the whole Christ you need the whole Word."

"Almost every major cult or aberration of orthodox Christianity has come about by affirming one part of Scripture, while denying or ignoring the rest."

It is a serious mistake when we fail to live by this reality. Almost every major cult or aberration of orthodox Christianity has come about by affirming one part of Scripture, while denying or ignoring the rest. This always produces lopsided theology. It is only by taking a careful and thorough "analogy of the faith",

a composite picture of biblical truth that we come to an accurate understanding of God's message. We dare not ever pit one passage against another, or cherry-pick favorites while ignoring the rest.

The Scripture *cannot* be broken, so the ones who distort the Scriptures—bending or twisting God's Word—do so to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). This is why, in Matthew 5:19, Jesus reminds us that, in Heaven's kingdom, people are esteemed in direct proportion to the value they place on the Word of God:

“Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

The kingdom of God is not impressed by the theological accolades or academic accomplishments of men. The simple-minded saint, with little or no formal education, who faithfully follows God's Word is considered great in the eyes of Heaven, while the august skeptic who scoffs at the Bible is disdained in the eyes of Heaven.

Remember that in Jesus' day the Pharisees were regarded as “experts” on the law, yet they had twisted and divided and manipulated God's Word for their own selfish purposes. Jesus pointedly informs them that God is not pleased or impressed by any person's attempt to undermine or alter His Word. Heaven admires simple faith, but God scorns those who scorn His Word.

What are Some Ways Genuine Believers Mishandle God's Word?

While it's easy to point our fingers at others, or scoff at the Pharisees or critics who scoff at God's Word, for Christian discipleship to be thoroughly influenced by *Sola Scriptura* and the unity of Scripture, we are compelled to examine ourselves. What are some common ways that even well-meaning and genu-

ine Christians can be guilty of walking contrary to the unbreakable Word of God?

First, through slothfulness, we as Christians often do not make ourselves aware of all of God's Word. Although William Tyndale gave his life to translate the Bible into the common language so that the "plow boy could be more knowledgeable of the Bible than the pope," the reality is we too often let God's Word sit unopened and unread on our bedside table. But if we do not know all of God's Word, how can we be sure that we are living by it accurately?

A second way we can fail to live by *Sola Scriptura* in our discipleship is by falling in love only with a certain *set* of verses, rather than every Bible verse. For example, as Christians, the truth of 1 John 4:8 (that "God is love") and the truth of 1 John 1:5 (that "God is light") should equally thrill us, and these truths should equally shape us. So-called love without holiness does not reflect God's nature, nor does so-called holiness without love.

As A.W. Tozer well expresses, "We must not select a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian." Some verses are more difficult to appreciate or understand, but every single one is equally inspired. Every Bible passage is not equally relevant to every particular situation, but every Bible passage is relevant and useful to our soul's overall health.

How do you read and study the Bible? Do you pick favorite verses, or "pet" texts in order to shape your opinions of God and His Word, or do you perform the hard work of regular study in order to grow in grace and in the understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? If we are not careful, we will handpick verses that support our mood, or desires, or sinful tendencies and seek to shape God's Word to our will, rather than allowing God's Word to shape us.

A third way in which we can fail to follow God's Word as Christians is by verbally and mentally affirming its truth, while denying it by our actions. Of

course, in our fallenness, we all do this to some degree. We fail to live up to the Word we know to be the perfect reflection of our perfect God. But we ought to always be open to having these areas pointed out to us, and we must be eager to make whatever adjustments—no matter how painful—are necessary to be conformed to Scripture. And this reminds us of a final, crucial application of *Sola Scriptura* to Christian discipleship.

God's Word is Unified, and It All Points to Christ

There is certainly meant to be a practical, sanctifying application of God's Word to each believer. As Paul points out, all of Scripture is meant to shape every aspect of our lives, and all of this to the end "that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

But God's Word is not merely a great big, leather-bound "how-to" manual for living. The entire Bible is pointing us to Jesus Christ as God's final Word for salvation. The failures of our first father Adam, and of each of the patriarchs in their turn, along with the perfection of the law of God we find recorded in the Old Testament—all this is meant to show us that, indeed, we as humans cannot save ourselves.

The very perfection of God's Word shows us our many imperfections. And so, we are meant to look to Christ, who is the perfect Savior, and who takes our place and pays for our sins. "But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Galatians 3:22).

Scripture is perfect in its entirety. And in its entirety, it points to our sinfulness and imperfection. It therefore points us to God's Son, Jesus, who is the only one who ever perfectly obeyed God's perfect Word. Nothing, then, could be more practical for Christian discipleship than being reminded that we can't do this at all without Christ Himself.

***Sola Scriptura* and Biblical Counseling**

By Joey Tomlinson



The biblical counseling movement, while a “big tent” ministry (evidenced by the different associations and educational institutions that use the term “biblical counseling”) unites under the conviction that the Scriptures are authoritative

and sufficient. The movement unites under the belief that our “[*Triune God’s*] *divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him...*” (2 Peter 1:3). However, this has often been misunderstood by critics of the biblical counseling movement and unfortunately misapplied by those within the movement.

While it is true that Scripture is our ultimate authority (for it is God-breathed and preserved), it is not true that sufficiency means we use *only* our Bi-

ble for the ailments of man. The sufficiency of Scripture can only be applied to those areas God intends. For example, it would be wrong for me to look in the Scripture to learn about the American Civil War. That is a silly and low-hanging example certainly, but the Scriptures are not sufficient to give me the history and the key players in the War Between the States—they were never intended to.

The Scriptures would be sufficient however, to tell me of the “passions at war” that cause “fights and quarrels” (James 4:1-3), which could give me insight into the many unseen intentions in the hearts of man. Again, I use this example to demonstrate that sufficiency is defined by God’s intention behind the Holy Writ. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) is not “Solo Scripture” (Scripture all by itself). Scriptural sufficiency means that Scripture is the only infallible rule of saving faith, knowledge, and obedience, but it does not mean that Scriptures speak about *everything*. The 1689 *London Confession of Faith* says it this way:

*“The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience, although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diversified manners to reveal Himself, and to declare (that) His will unto His church; and afterward for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now completed.”*¹

Notice in the confession the statement, “*the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God.*” That is an interesting statement and one that deserves further investigation. The-

ologians call this “natural revelation”, and it is limited in that it is not sufficient to give the knowledge necessary for salvation, but it is sufficient in other capacities.

Furthermore, in the Reformed tradition, it is understood that the Scriptures are the “rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience”. The Scriptures preserve and propagate the truth, they establish the Church, comfort the Church, fight against “corruption of the flesh and malice of Satan, and of the world”. So, an intent is laid down regarding the use and sufficiency of Scripture and another revelation, a *natural* one, is communicated as well.

“In God’s common grace, there is wisdom and truth to be found in places other than Scripture.”

These revelations have been called by some as God’s “two books” of revelation—the “Book of Scripture” and the “Book of Nature”. Now, a wise biblical counselor should read (and thus counsel) from *both* books. In fact, in the care of someone created in the Image of God, it is our duty as counselors to read from both books. It is also Protestant and Reformed to read and counsel from both books.

I think of men like Richard Baxter (1615-1691) who was a pastor, and by necessity, a lay physician, who sometimes treated people that he described as having “*physiological disturbances, physical diseases, and general weaknesses.*”ⁱⁱ There were instances in which Baxter would have needed to look to the “Book of Nature” to address and alleviate the physical sufferings of those entrusted to his care; and at other times he would need the infallible rule of faith—Holy Scripture.

This is but one example from Church history; but think about Scripture’s own testimony for more evidence as well. Consider for a moment this command

by God's Word to *be wise*. Many people go to counseling to gain wisdom. What are some of the various ways we receive wisdom? Should we picture an isolated Christian in a closet somewhere with his/her Bible as the only means by which wisdom is attained? Certainly, time alone in God's Word is of supreme importance, but Scripture's own testimony speaks of *other* places we get wisdom. This is God's world after all, and so it is only natural that we could search it out for His wisdom. In addition to God's Word being a place where we acquire wisdom, we get it from the advice of others (Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 13:1; 18:17; 19:20; 24:6;), and we get it by paying attention to the animals and insects—God's order of things (Proverbs 6:6; 30:24-28).

In God's common grace, there is wisdom and truth to be found in places other than Scripture. So, I want to conclude this brief article by encouraging pastors and counselors to read from both "books"—the "Book of Scripture" and the "Book of Nature"; both are revelatory, and wisdom can be found when the "books" are rightly stewarded—rightly read and rightly applied. When we grasp this—and by God's grace, grow in this—we will simultaneously grow in our abilities to truly help other image bearers.

References:

ⁱ <https://www.the1689confession.com/chapter-1>

ⁱⁱ Richard Baxter, *Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life: Practical Wisdom from Richard Baxter*, ed. Michael S. Lundy (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 114.

***Sola Scriptura* and Roman Catholicism**

By Jacob Tanner

Martin Luther's famous words spoken at the Diet of Worms continue to reverberate and echo throughout the halls of Church history:



“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.”

Perhaps there is no greater example of *Sola Scriptura* than this: the conviction that Scripture *alone* is authoritative and true for all matters of life, faith, and practice.

Of course, Luther's speech at the Diet of Worms was borne from a heart that was convinced that the traditions of Roman Catholic Popes and councils had diluted the teachings of God's Word with perverse twistings of Scripture and satanic subtleties. Luther, and many of the other Reformers, saw the sinfulness of Rome's elite and understood that their mishandling of God's Word and propagation of false doctrines would continue to darken the light of the gospel and lead confused men even further astray. If any were saved while hearing the preaching of Roman bishops, priests, cardinals, and popes at this time, it was despite their damnable teachings and not at all because of them.

“The problem is that they believe that not only Scripture alone, but popes, councils, and traditions can be elevated to the same status of authority and infallibility.”

The question, however, is a simple one: what is the difference between Protestantism's teaching of *Sola Scriptura* and Roman Catholicism's views?

Roman Catholicism Believes That the Scriptures Do Not Teach *Sola Scriptura*

To be fair, it must be granted that Roman Catholicism is not rejecting the authority of Scripture. Roman Catholicism teaches that the Scriptures are authoritative, infallible, and true. The problem is that they believe that not only Scripture alone, but popes, councils, and traditions can be elevated to the same status of authority and infallibility. They claim this is primarily because the *Scriptures themselves do not teach Sola Scriptura*.

If we attempt to prove Scripture by looking for only *one specific verse* to form this doctrine, then we could, at least theoretically, have some issues. For example, there is no Bible verse that specifically states, “Scripture *alone* is authoritative and true.” Of course, the opposite is true too. No verse ever states, “Scripture *and* tradition *and* popes *and* councils are authoritative and true.” In one sense, because *both* Catholics and Protestants agree that Scripture is authoritative and infallible, the burden of proof is on Roman Catholics to demonstrate that, according to the Bible, things outside Scripture can carry the same weight and authority.

However, there are some texts to which Protestants *can* and *must* appeal to. For starters, there is 2 Timothy 3:16, which states, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” There is simply nothing else that the Bible ever states to be “breathed out by God” in this same way. Likewise, nothing else is ever said to be “*profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” This elevated status belongs only to the Word of God.

Another helpful text comes in Acts 17. There, we find the Apostle Paul

“But, if there is a contradiction between a pope or council and God’s Word, then it must be admitted that the problem is not with the Bible...”

himself preaching the Word of God. The Bereans, upon hearing the Apostle, take what he preaches and compare it to the Scriptures. In other words, they will not accept what he says as true—even though he’s an Apostle! —unless it corresponds to God’s Word. For this, they are commended: “*Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the*

word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The principle of Scripture is that all things ought to be weighed

against God's Word. My own practice is to encourage my congregation, and all others who hear me preach, to compare what I say against Scripture. I do this for two reasons: (1) I know I'm not infallible, and I may in fact get things wrong. I want the people who hear me to be led to the truth of God's Word, and not my own misguided ideas or opinions. And (2) I trust that God's Word is true and as I attempt to exposit and preach it, I want the people who hear to learn to do the same for themselves. But, if there is a contradiction between a pope or council and God's Word, then it must be admitted that the problem is not with the Bible, but with the human agents who have rejected or contradicted the Holy Scriptures.

One of the most helpful verses comes from 1 Corinthians 4:6, which is where the Apostle Paul declares, *"I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another."* Once more, we have the example of an *Apostle* subjugating himself to the authority of God's Word and encouraging all other Christians to do the same. "Not going beyond what is written" is a clear charge to not add to God's Word (or take away from it).

Finally, we have Jesus Himself, in Mark 7:7, lamenting the sins of the Pharisees who Jesus claims, *"in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."* Jesus saw the elevation of man-made commandments and traditions as sinning against God. Equating the traditions of man to the authority of God's Word created a vain worship of God. Though no one verse explicitly states that "Scripture alone is authoritative and true", the doctrine can easily be formulated from simple texts like those above.

Roman Catholicism Believes the Traditions of the Church are Infallible

This may sound strange at first, because there are certainly some Protestant churches that effectively behave as though their traditions are equal in weight and authority to Scripture. However, these churches are merely exceptions that prove the rule of the doctrine. Protestantism believes that Scripture alone is authoritative, and so the Church is to always be reforming. If a tradition does not correspond to God's Word, then the tradition must be flatly rejected or reformed to align with the Bible.

Rome, of course, rejected the Protestant view and answered the Reformation with their own *Council of Trent*. One of the most obvious places where *Sola Scriptura* is rejected in favor of the authority of tradition is in the following statement from Trent:

"In order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall,--in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, --wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church,--whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures,--hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published. Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established" (4.2).

So, in other words, if an interpretation of Scripture led one to contradict the established traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, then they were very much in danger of being anathematized.

Now, there is of course a great deal of truth that there is value in the orthodox councils, creeds, and confessions of the past. Typically, up until the Middle

Ages, most of the creeds originated from Christians who genuinely desired to know the truth of the Scriptures so that they could formulate systematized statements of common faith which all Christians must hold to in order to be saved. *Sola Scriptura* does not deny the value of these past creeds or confessions. In fact, any Christian holding to *Sola Scriptura* must also affirm The Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasius Creed because these creeds are thoroughly biblical and propagate biblical doctrines. At the same time, *Sola Scriptura* does not prevent Christians from using terms that are not in Scripture. Terms like *Trinity*, *Sola Scriptura*, and many terms used to describe the classical doctrine of God, all originate from outside Scripture, but simultaneously agree with it. And, of course, *Sola Scriptura* does not preclude the Christian from discovering truth in outside sources (i.e., men like Plato and Aristotle, though not Christian, are able to teach Christians certain truths about the nature of the world).

The major difference is that *Sola Scriptura* recognizes traditions may be wrong and in need of reformation. Likewise, it sees that Church traditions, creeds, and councils must also be subjugated to the authority of God's Word.

Roman Catholicism Believes That the Teachings of the Roman Church are Infallible

There are a number of reasons that Rome finally and blatantly stated that it believed itself infallible. But the majority of these reasons are tied to the Pope himself. The simplest place to see this is in the First Vatican Council of the 1800's. Under the declarations of the First Vatican Council, Rome decreed:

“And so, supported by the clear witness of holy scripture, and adhering to the manifest and explicit decrees both of our predecessors the Roman pontiffs and of general councils, we promulgate anew the definition of the ecumenical council of Florence, which must be believed by all faithful Christians, namely that the

apostolic see and the Roman pontiff hold a world-wide primacy, and that the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, true vicar of Christ, head of the whole church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal church” (4.3.1).

The primary reason this doctrine is believed and taught is because of Matthew 16:18-19, wherein Jesus told Peter, *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Rome’s reasoning is pretty straightforward from here: since Jesus invested papal authority to Peter, and since the Pope sits in the place of Peter with the keys of the Kingdom, then the Pope speaks with the authority of Jesus Himself to “loose” or “bind” things on earth and in Heaven.

“In fact, Peter later wrote that all Christians belong to a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).”

This, of course, is not actually what Jesus was teaching at all. Rather, the previous verses make it clear that Jesus was using a simile to explain that He would build His Church upon the rock of Peter’s testimony. Matthew 16:15-17 reveals this truth:

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the

Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’”

Putting this text together, then, what we find is that Peter answered Jesus’s question correctly. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter’s name, of course, means “rock”, and so Jesus is clearly making a statement about Peter’s

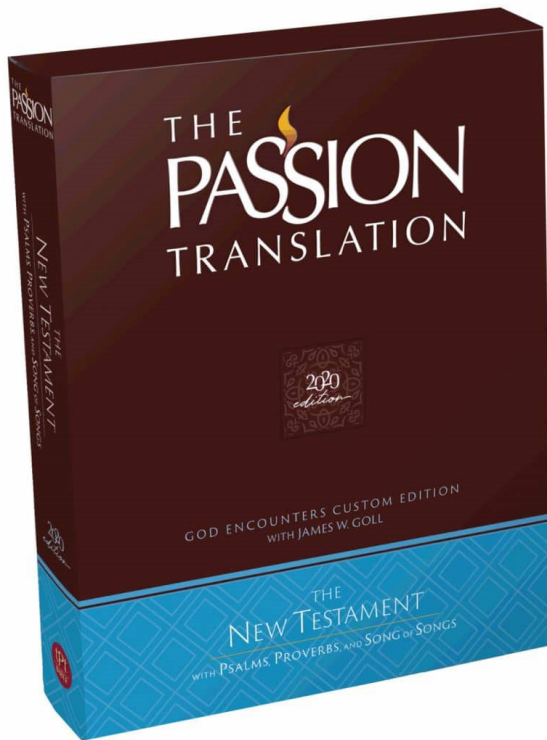
testimony being the rock upon which the Church was built and continues to stand.

With that in mind, the promise of receiving the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and being granted the ability to both bind and loose on earth and in Heaven, relates clearly to discipline within Church, and belongs to the priesthood of believers. In fact, Peter later wrote that all Christians belong to a *royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9).

It isn't that Roman Catholicism denies the authority of Scripture, but that by denying *Sola Scriptura*, Roman Catholicism elevates things to the place of Scripture that simply do not deserve equal footing. All things, including traditions, popes, councils, and everything else in between, must be subject to God and His Word as revealed in the Bible.

***Sola Scriptura* and the New Apostolic Reformation**

By Dave Jenkins



As we consider the topic of *Sola Scriptura*, it is imperative that we develop a good grasp on the subject, because many Bible translations lead people astray from biblical truth. By using one primary example in The Passion Translation as how people can be led astray by the Bible version/translation they read, I hope that this will help you to discover and use only the best transla-

tions available (whether in English, Spanish, or some other language).

The Passion Translation (TPT) is a “paraphrase translation” done by Brian Simmons. Brian advocates the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), which affirms present-day apostles, prophets, and miracles, while also emphasizing taking do-

minion over the earth. To understand The Passion Translation, we must understand the author of The Passion Translation, Brian Simmons.

Brian Simmons and The Passion Translation

The Passion Translation website states that Brian Simmons is the lead translator of The Passion Translation. It also clarifies that Brian was a translator with New Tribes but didn't list any of his qualifications to translate Scripture. This is very concerning as, typically, someone translating Scripture has an academic specialization in either Greek or Hebrew and a demonstrated mastery of both languages. Instead of a team approach to biblical translation, The Passion Translation only lists Brian as the translator. In his own words, Brian admits that he has no training in biblical languages. In an interview with the Welton's Academy's Podcast, which has since been taken down, but is available in another format, Brian Simmons stated, *"I had minimal background in biblical languages, so yeah, it was something that, honestly, something the Lord has really helped me with."*

We will come back to this point about Brian's lack of academic credentials to translate Scripture, but before we do, we need to first understand how the best translations are completed. Doing so will help us understand why The Passion Translation has not only a dangerous past in how it was formed because of Brian Simmons, but also because of the fact that he had no real committee helping him through the translation process.

One example of a solid translation is the English Standard Version (ESV). The ESV has more than 100 Bible scholars who produced it—an international team from many denominations. By translating the ESV in this way—in committee and by those who have mastered Greek and Hebrew, experts in their respective theological fields—it was ensured that the work done was completed as correctly as possible and did not set forth the dominant theological view of one person or group of Christians over another. Further, the utilization of a team approach to translation makes said translation trustworthy because reputable

scholars produce it. Simmons' one "credential" is that he (a self-proclaimed "apostle") assisted a translation project among indigenous people in Panama with New Tribes Mission (now called Ethnos360). He has no formal biblical language training, just eight years of on-the-job training with New Tribes Mission, unlike the people who translated the ESV, who have the highest academic credentials from the most respected seminaries and universities in the world.

It's been noted by many others that The Passion Translation was translated from the Aramaic transcripts that date back to the 5th century. The ESV translation was translated primarily from Greek manuscripts that were written many years earlier. This is important because this means there was less time for its text to be changed or for there to be copyist errors.

Even more concerning than Brian's lack of formal academic credentials to translate the Bible is that he says, *"The Lord called [him] to translate the entire Bible."* In a recording on YouTube (minutes 13:56 to 14:23), Brian says this of how he came to translate the Bible:

"I said 'Lord, if you really are calling me to do this, I want you to speak to me and I want it to be so clear to me that I have no doubt it was you.' Well, that night, after laying it out before him, I had a visitation and I was given a commission by the Lord as he breathed on me, and released me, and called to translate the Bible. And, uh, I am doing this as obedience. It-it...to me it's an act of obedience."

God has spoken in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments (2 Timothy 3:16) and speaks to His people every time His people read it or hear it preached (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Did God speak in times of antiquity? Absolutely (Hebrews 1:1-2). Does God speak today? Yes, but by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. The Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 155, states, *"The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means..."* Ephesians 6:18 says, *"The sword of the Spirit...is the word of God."*

The Holy Spirit takes the written Word and opens our hearts' understanding of the truths contained in the Scriptures. Psalm 19 rejoices in this when it says, "The law" is "the law of the Lord", "the testimony" is "the testimony of the Lord", "the precepts" are "the precepts of the Lord", "the commandment" is "the commandment of the Lord", and "the rules" are "the rules of the Lord."

The Word of God and Hearing from God Today

During the Protestant Reformation, people were looking for a word from the Lord just as they search for one today. The Reformers were men like Martin Luther and John Calvin, who proclaimed there was only one place to hear God speak audibly: in the Scriptures. These men affirmed what is known as *Sola Scriptura*, which means the Scriptures are God's inspired, inerrant, sufficient, clear, and authoritative Word.

What we've considered in this article is very concerning already, but more concerning than everything up until this point regarding Brian's background is the actual *translation theory* behind The Passion Translation. This is what The Passion Translation website says:

"That's the governing philosophy behind The Passion Translation®: to transfer the essential meaning of God's original message found in the biblical languages to modern English...The Passion Translation is an essential equivalence translation. TPT maintains the essential form and essential function of the original words. It is a meaning-for-meaning translation, translating the essence of God's original message and heart into modern English."

"Dynamic equivalent" is a method of Bible translation that aims to reproduce the text of Scripture using modern language to communicate Scripture to modern audiences. Dynamic equivalence considers the original biblical context, culture, figures-of-speech, and more. It aims to help today's Bible readers understand the biblical text in the same way as the original hearers. Dynamic equiva-

lence translations are less concerned with providing a word-for-word English translation of the original biblical text as it is with communicating the sense of that verse to the readers.

Most Bible translations fall into either *literal* or *dynamic equivalence*. Literal equivalence are those translations that provide a word-for-word translation of the original word or phrase with an equivalent English word or phrase as much

“Instead of seeking to be as close to the original languages as possible, the dynamic/functional/essential equivalence tries to communicate the broader meaning...”

as possible. Literal translations are formal equivalence, a philosophy of biblical translation that aims to render the original biblical text as closely as possible. Examples of formal equivalence or literal translations are the English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New King James Version (NKJV),

King James Version (KJV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and Revised Standard Version (RSV).

Unlike literal (word-for-word) translations, a thought-for-thought, meaning-driven translation method is used to achieve *dynamic* equivalence. *Functional equivalence* can also be applied to dynamic or thought-for-thought translations. The Passion Translation is an example of this type of translation, as the official website states that it aims to be an *essential equivalence* translation. Instead of seeking to be as close to the original languages as possible, the dynamic/functional/essential equivalence tries to communicate the broader meaning of the original biblical text. Because essential equivalent and functional equivalence move away from a formal, word-for-word translation method, these two methods are naturally closer to paraphrasing. They aim to reproduce the same dynamic impact the text had on its original audience. I (and other serious theo-

logians) reject this form of biblical translation, instead upholding formal equivalence translation because it ensures the biblical text's accuracy for readers unfamiliar with Greek or Hebrew.

Comparing The Passion Translation to the English Standard Version

The translation-theory of The Passion Translation becomes readily apparent as we consider a few examples of The Passion Translation in various Scriptures. We will compare The Passion Translation to the ESV in the below table. As a note, the text in green is merely there for emphasis, so that the reader can see clearly the differences between the translations more clearly.

	The Passion Translation	English Standard Version
John 1:14	“And so the Living Expression became a man and lived among us! And we gazed upon the splendor of his glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father overflowing.”	“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

- John 1:14 is one the most important verses of Scripture dealing with the Incarnation of Christ says in Greek that the “**word became flesh**”. Not the “**living expression became a man**”.

Romans 1:5 “Through him a joy-producing grace cascaded into us, empowering us with the **gift of apostleship**, so that we can win people from every nation into a faithful commitment to Jesus, to bring honor to his name.”

“through whom we have received **grace and apostleship** to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.”

- “Gift of the apostleship” is consistent with NAR theology affirming present-day apostles. But the original text does not say “**gift**”, it says “**grace**”.
- This is another example of NAR theology being imposed on the text in order to support the idea that apostles are a gift for the church today.

Galatians 6:1 “My beloved friends, if you see a believer who is overtaken with a fault, may **the one who overflows with the Spirit** seek to restore him. Win him over with gentle words

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are **spiritual** should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

which will open his heart
to you and will keep you
from exalting yourself over
him.”

- “The one who overflows with the spirit” is not what the Greek says. It is simply one word: “spiritual”.
- This is another example of the NAR’s overemphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit working in miraculous ways in the Church today.

1 Timothy 2:12

“I don’t advocate that the
newly converted women be
the teachers in the church,
assuming authority over
the men, but to live in

“I do not permit **a woman** to
teach or to exercise authority
over a man; rather, she is to
remain quiet.”

- TPT says, “**newly converted women**”. But the Greek simply says, “**a woman**”.
- The NAR supports women pastors and elders, which is not biblical. So, it adds “*newly converted*” into the text, implying that women who are not newly converted can be teachers and have

authority in the church. This alters the text to make it say the opposite of what the original text actually says.

1 Timothy 6:16 “He alone is the immortal God, living in the unapproachable light of divine glory! **No one has ever seen his fullness, nor can they,** for all the glory and endless authority of the universe belongs to him, forever and ever. Amen!”

“...who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom **no one has ever seen or can see.** To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”

- In the NAR movement, people regularly say that they have *seen God*. This is very problematic, given this verse. So, TPT alters it to say that no one's ever seen God's “**fullness**”. That is not what the text says, but again it has been altered to suit NAR theology.

The Passion Translation is At the Heart of the New Apostolic Reformation

Throughout this article, we've considered Brian Simmons' background, the translation theory behind The Passion Translation, and compared The Passion Translation to the ESV. Now it's imperative to also recognize that many leaders

in the New Apostolic Reformation not only accept The Passion Translation as a valid biblical translation, but also often refuse to acknowledge any other translation. To put a finer point on this, The Passion Translation is at the heart of the New Apostolic Reformation.

The NAR teaches the necessity of the present-day governing offices of apostles and prophets, along with their new “authoritative revelations”. Many leaders in the NAR recommend The Passion Translation, and it is used by many leaders in the NAR on Sundays to teach the people of God. Simmons holds the governing office of “apostle” with Harvest International Ministry and works closely with many NAR leaders. New Apostolic Reformation leaders endorse his translation almost exclusively (if not exclusively). His translation shows significant evidence of New Apostolic Reformation doctrinal bias. For these reasons, critics of this translation have dubbed it the “New Apostolic Reformation Bible”. Consider the following leaders and people who have endorsed The Passion Translation:

- **Michael W. Smith, Grammy Award-Winning artist, best-selling author, and humanitarian:** *“The Passion Translation is a gift to Bible readers. It is a beautiful marriage of powerful accuracy and readable, natural language. The vivid wording strips away the centuries, reminding me with every phrase that each prophecy, letter, history account, poem, vision, and parable is God’s Word to me today just as much as it was to the original audiences. The Passion Translation encourages, convicts, teaches, and comforts me, and it continuously draws me to worship.”*
- **Bill Johnson, Pastor, Bethel Church and best-selling author, says of The Passion Translation:** *“One of the*

greatest things to happen with Bible translation in my lifetime.”

- **Dr. James Goll, International best-selling author and co-founder of Encounters Network, says:** *“With the mind of a scholar and heart of a lover, Brian Simmons combines the best of both worlds for us in his devoted translation work in Letters from Heaven. What a marvelous job my friend and seasoned leader is doing for the body of Christ! I applaud the life and ministry of Brian Simmons!”*
- **John and Lisa Bevere, founders of Messenger International, and best-selling authors, say:** *“Brian Simmons’ work is truly breathtaking! We so appreciate the labor of love that went into translating the Scriptures directly from the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The Passion Translation has energized our study of the Bible, and we’re certain it will do the same for you.”*
- **Dr. Ché Ahn, President and Founder of Harvest International Ministry, Rock Church, and International Chancellor of the Wagner University, says:** *“I believe The Passion Translation will be the Bible of choice for the next Jesus people movement.”*
- **Dr. Chuck Pierce, President of Global Sphere and Glory of Zion International says:** *“I have devoured The Passion Translation! There is a fragrance of God’s Spirit that emanates from the powerful expressions that Brian Simmons has brought forth in this translation. Not only have I used The Passion Translation for teaching, but I have picked up certain books of the Bible and read them like a living novel. I love this translation!”*

The Word of God is the reliable, trustworthy, without error, without the possibility of error, clear, for every phase and every part, and binding Word of God. The Passion Translation fails to capture the biblical text's purity, intended meaning, and tone. It is not a translation and should not be used to read, study, or preach from.

We Don't Need Fresh Revelation—Here's Why...

Hebrews 1:1-4 illustrates the Lord Jesus's public ministry by showing He is superior to the Old Testament prophets because He is preeminent in His person and His work. Hebrews 1:1-4 makes the superior claim of Jesus and highlights how He is the Prophet, Priest, and King of the New Covenant. Jesus has ended the need for prophets as He is the ultimate prophet and the bringer of and culmination of divine revelation (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus all find their culmination in all the elements, practices, and offices that point to Him. Jesus' death brought to an end animal sacrifice and the need for human high priests, since He is now the High Priest and ultimate sacrifice for His people (Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 4:14-16).

"At many times and in many ways," God began preparing the world through the Prophets for the coming of His Son, Jesus. So that in these last days—these days of God's redemptive fulfillment in Jesus Christ—we might enter into the fullness of salvation (John 14:6). When we receive Jesus as the Truth, then He becomes the Way for us to enter into Life Everlasting, for Jesus is God's final Word. Even if all else in the world is lost, Christians must hold fast to Him in faith.

The Word of God is a priceless jewel that contains the treasure of the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). The promises of God testify from the first word to the last word, and everywhere in-between, of the Redeemer to come, who has come, and who is to return in Christ. Today, if you want to hear God

audibly speak, open the Word and read it aloud, for it contains the promises of the God that find their completion in Christ alone.

Avoiding The Passion Translation and the New Apostolic Reformation

Finally, here are three suggested responses to this: (1) Read the Bible in a dynamic equivalent translation such as the NASB, the ESV, or the NKJV. (2) Avoid churches that preach from or use The Passion Translation. (3) Find a Bible-believing and Bible-practicing local church with biblically qualified male pastors and elders that preach from either the NASB or ESV, and who open the Bible and teach verse-by-verse through books of the Bible.

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For more on these matters please consider these episodes of Equipping You in Grace:
<https://servantsofgrace.org/four-biblical-reasons-to-reject-the-passion-translation/>
<https://servantsofgrace.org/the-marks-of-the-new-apostolic-reformation-with-dawn-hill/>
<https://servantsofgrace.org/the-dangers-of-bethel-and-the-nar-movement-with-holly-pivec/>

***Sola Scriptura* and Preaching**

By Parker Reardon



When a believer affirms *Sola Scriptura*, what are they affirming? We affirm the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind

the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The scriptural conviction of *Sola Scriptura* is paramount to the individual Christian being healthy and is equally vital for the strength of the local church, of which he or she is an active part. If the starting point of pursuing church health is concerning ourselves with what we are taught, in other words, sound

(or healthy) doctrine (Titus 2:1), we also need to be concerned with *how* we are taught, for the way that sound doctrine is disseminated is through faithful exposition of Scripture. This is not a mere option, but a non-negotiable statute to any church that desires to honor the Lord and grow in spiritual vitality and health. There is a plethora of storytellers, motivational speakers, and topical preachers who share thoughts about the theme of a passage, but that is not Bible exposition.

There is no biblical ministry where the Word of God does not reign and rule supremely, for no congregation rises higher than their view of the pulpit. Paul taught his protege, Timothy, that he must be captivated by the Word of God. He said, "*Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching*" (1 Timothy 4:13). This present active imperative to "give attention" (*prosecho*) teaches that this practice of being attentive was to characterize every faithful church. Healthy churches concern themselves not with novelty or creative ingenuity, but in tying themselves into how faithful ministry has been performed. The Early Church publicly read Scripture, followed by the elders' exposition of that same text. Paul commanded his disciple, "*Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction*" (2 Timothy 4:2).

The expositional model reaches back further than the early Church, however. Consider the Old Testament model of Ezra. "*They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading*" (Nehemiah 8:8). Bible preachers and teachers must give their hearers the sense of what Scripture means; they must explain what God means by what He has said.

This is the model we have set before us in the Gospels, Acts, and the other New Testament Epistles—that of preaching and proclaiming (*keyrusso*) God's Word (Matthew 3:1; 4:17; Acts 28:31; 2 Timothy 4:2). Faithful men exemplified

preaching the Gospel (*euangelizo*), whether it be our Lord or the beloved apostle Paul (Luke 8:1; Acts 8:4-5; 15:35).

Simply put, the expositor of Scripture is driven by the text, not just sharing some thoughts or opinions, and then sprinkling in some random verses to make it sound biblical. Biblical exposition takes God's people to the text, explains the text, and exhorts with that text for the people to apply it. ⁱⁱⁱ Strong, biblical, expository preaching is crucial to the health and vitality of the local church. Any real revival, reformation, great missionary expansion, or true church growth has been catapulted forth by faithful Biblical exposition. Jesus' exposition on the Road to Emmaus caused the disciples hearts to burn within them, as the Scriptures were explained to them. Peter's powerful expositions of the Old Testament on the day of Pentecost is what God used to draw a few thousand to faith.

I recall a guest leaving our worship service saying how he loved the music and then added in what sounded like an obligatory, "Oh, and the message was okay, too." Far too many who are attending church services likewise do not prize and value the biblical education that is only fostered by expository preaching.

In our mass-media age, when people's attention span has been reduced to soundbites, we must remember that faith comes by hearing. God has chosen to be heard, not seen. The exposition comes to us with the unique ability to inform the intellect, to confront rebel wills, and to stir the affections, as the meaning of the text is faithfully unpacked through the instrumentality of the human voice. Voices which thunder the Word of God, as faithful shepherds preach with precision, passion, and power declaring, "Thus says the Lord."

The Bible was written to communicate objective truth in definite words that convey precise meanings. That is, the point of the passage is the point of the sermon. Expositors first unpack the meaning on their own through careful

exegesis and that exegesis drives their exposition. Paul warns of those who adulterate the Word of God, yet what the Church's commitment must be is the open "manifestation of truth" (2 Corinthians 4:2). We must be committed to the disclosure (*phanerosis*), bringing to light, or making plain the meaning of the text.

The pulpit proclamation is based not on what the preacher has creatively thought up that week, but what was on the pages before him, studied in context. And next Sunday, should Jesus tarry, is the next pericope, paragraph, or set of verses. Again, Paul told Timothy that what was to be the priority of his ministry in shepherding the flock in the truth is preaching the Word (2 Timothy 4:2).^{iv}

Sadly, we live in a day that prizes relevance over revelation. Man's itching ears have driven him to poll the audience to see what they prefer, over what God has said. However, rather than the pragmatic methodologies of man, who often thinks he knows better than God, we must respond obediently to divine revelation, which underscores the absolute imperative of Biblical exposition. Just the doctrine of the Bible's inspiration should be reason enough to read it, explain it, and exhort the congregation with it! Faithful expositor of Scripture of over half a century, John MacArthur, posited:

"Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? If we believe that 'all Scripture is inspired by God' and inerrant, must we not be equally committed to the reality that it is 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16-17)? Should not that magnificent truth determine how we preach?"^v

"This movement, Martin Luther explained, was founded upon the unshakable footing of God's truth."

As the Church began to awaken to the centrality of the Scriptures during the Reformation, Martin Luther was asked to explain this success. This great Reformer replied, with implicit confidence in the power of God's Word, *"I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept...the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."*

This movement, Martin Luther explained, was founded upon the unshakable footing of God's truth. And nothing has changed in the last 500+ years. In this present hour, preachers must still rely exclusively upon the power of God's Word in their ministry and re-affirm the Reformation conviction of *Sola Scriptura!*

The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, or scripture alone, is a central belief, not only of the Protestant Reformation, but of faithful and healthy churches of our own day. It comes as no surprise to find that this doctrine also formed the bedrock of Charles Haddon Spurgeon's preaching in his day. He, who was dubbed "Prince of Preachers", in speaking of Christ's and the Apostle Paul's views of Scripture, said:

"Evidently, they regarded the statements of Scripture as conclusive. They took counsel of the Scriptures, and so they ended the matter. "It is written," was to them proof positive and indisputable. "Thus saith the Lord," was the final word: enough for their mind and heart, enough for their conscience and understanding...To go behind Scripture did not occur to the first teachers of our faith: they heard the Oracle of divine testimony and bowed their heads in reverence. So it ought to be with us: we have erred from the faith, and we shall pierce ourselves through with many sorrows, unless we feel that if the Scripture saith it, it is even so."

Spurgeon found the Bible to be totally authoritative and sufficient. Note the language that he uses; he does not say "go beyond" Scripture, but to "go behind" it. In terms of understanding the faith and proper practice of Christianity,

there is nowhere outside of Scripture to which we look. To do so is not to gain insight, but to lose sight of what God has given for our instruction. If we do not acknowledge the truth of Scripture, we have “erred from the faith.”

Where did Spurgeon get such confidence in the Bible’s authority? Primarily, from its divine authorship. *“This volume is the writing of the living God; each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit.”* Did you catch that? Written with an Almighty finger! Scripture is not a record of the words of mere men. If it was, he states, “we might reject them.” Instead, Scripture is the very Word of God: *“This Bible is a book of authority; it is an authorized book, for God has written it.”*

So why do so many preachers of our day substitute a multitude of their words for His? The Bible has God as its author, so it follows that it would be free from error. Spurgeon reached this same conclusion, stating that, *“We must settle in our minds that the Word of God must certainly be true, absolutely infallible, and beyond all question.”*^{vi}

This understanding of Scripture’s divine authority allowed Spurgeon to preach from any passage with confidence and clarity. Expository preaching is not an optional method of ministry, but the quintessential imperative. It is not something we can take or leave, depending on the cultural preference of the day. It is the centerpiece of corporate worship as the Church gathers and is the fountainhead of all spiritual growth.

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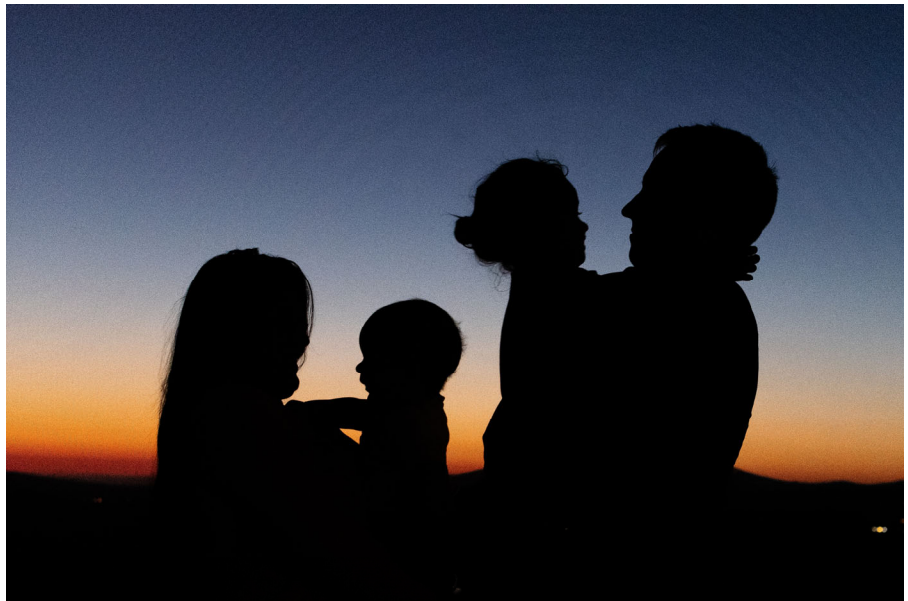
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- ii. Hughes Oliphant Old in *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, vol 1 surveys the practice of biblical preaching from Moses, throughout the OT, NT, and into the age of the early church fathers.
- iii. ⁱⁱⁱ Since much is done in the name of exposition, but is not, it would behoove the reader to study *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* and other such recommended resources at the end of this article.
- iv. ^{iv} Consider going to www.biblicalexpositor.org for "A Biblical Case for Expository Preaching" which is an exposition of this passage. <https://www.biblicalexpositor.org/file/0b5d63b0-0e7e-11eb-addd-2590ab226035>
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***Sola Scriptura* and Parenting**

By Scott Hurst

God's covenant is one of the clearest pictures of *Sola Scriptura*, the authority and sufficiency of God's Word for His

people. It is in the context of His covenant that He gives His law as the final authority for their life and worship. Being God's people, the receivers of covenantal blessings, meant being obedient to His law (Exodus 24:7). This also carries over to the New Covenant. God's Word calls (Romans 10:14-17), sanctifies (John 17:17), and governs the Church (2 Timothy 4:1-8). Every resource we need to keep a covenant with God comes from the application of Scripture. His Covenant, which shows us *Sola Scriptura*, is also the picture of parenting in the Bible.



Parenting is a joy. Proverbs 23:24 says, "The father of a righteous son will re-

joyce greatly, and one who fathers a wise son will delight in him.” This rejoicing is sweetened when it is the fruit of the father’s long and loving labor to pass on wisdom to his son. It is the reward of a son who treasured his parents’ instruction like jewels around his neck (Proverbs 1:9-10). The father that Proverbs 23:24 speaks of shares the joy of the Apostle John: *“I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in truth”* (3 John 4).

Parenting is a joy... and incredibly hard. Seeing parenting in the picture of God’s Covenant, with *Sola Scriptura* in the middle, helps sustain our joy and strengthen our resolve when parenting gets tough. Just as the Israelites could trust God’s Word to deliver what they needed to keep their covenant obligations, parents can trust God’s Word to supply them with what is necessary for the difficult joy of parenting.

God’s Word equips parents to give their children all they need. *“There is one sure and infallible guide to truth,”* G. Campbell Morgan said, *“and therefore one, and only one, corrective for error, and that is the Word of God.”*

“Biblical parenting principles have pictures. People are gifted imitators, so we learn better when we have examples.”

Paul tells Timothy, who is like a son to him, *“Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teach-*

ing, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Parents who desire for their children to be wise for salvation, and equipped for every good work, nourish their family with the scriptures. Jesus prayed, *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”* (John 17:17). To know the

truth and to teach the truth to our children, we must have the conviction of *Sola Scriptura*. Sharing this conviction will not make cookie-cutter parents. There's no way that parenting has a one-size-fits-all approach. My wife and I both have godly parents who were nothing alike in their parenting styles. You will find similarities in every Christian home, but not sameness. The conviction to submit to the Scripture's authority and to its sufficiency means that we take our principles and pictures for raising children from the Bible.

A Picture with a Principle

Biblical parenting principles have pictures. People are gifted imitators, so we learn better when we have examples. There is no greater model for parents than God Himself. He is the Father par excellence and shows us that parenting is a covenant type of commitment.

Relationships are often compared to contracts. A covenant is different. A covenant is a solemn oath with blessings for keeping promises and curses for breaking promises. The Lexham Bible Dictionary makes helpful distinctions between covenants and contracts. *"In application, contracts are limited by the terms of the exchange of property ("this is yours, that is mine"), while covenants involve an exchange of life ("I am yours, you are mine")."* Parenting involves this exchange of life. We don't contract our services for our children, but we give them our life and our love. God's covenant defines how He relates to us and gives shape to how parents raise their kids. The context of a covenant is where the blessings and promises of parenting shine brightest.

A Promise of Perseverance

Commitment sustains love. Couples have the honeymoon stage at the start of their marriage. This is when they are so "in love" that nothing can disrupt their affection for each other. As a romantic at heart, I treasure candlelight dinners, handwritten love notes, and snuggles while watching Rom-Coms. There is something beautiful in the romance, but it is not sustainable. When the honey-

moon stage eventually fades, love needs to be forged by something stronger than romance. Love perseveres because of commitment.

Unlike us, God's love never falters, yet the Bible often connects God's love for us to His covenant promises. God's covenant is His love-saturated commitment to give Himself completely to His people. A contract is voided when one party doesn't keep their end, but God's covenant ensures His *"steadfast love endures forever"* (Psalm 100:5).

This covenant type of commitment keeps us going when parenting gets hard. I realized this when we had our first son. When he was all smiles, giggles, and cuddles, I didn't need extra motivation to love him. But I would not have endured the poopy diapers, sleepless nights, and terrible back pain if I wasn't his dad. The commitment kept me in the game.

A Promise of Security

God's covenant is a promise of security. The story of the Bible is filled with God's people making big mistakes, and yet He remains faithful. His people are secure in His love. *"Because God wanted to show his unchangeable purpose even more clearly to the heirs of the promise, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us"* (Hebrews 6:17-18). As Christians find assurance because God made a promise, so also children find peace when parents affirm their commitment. They are secure because they are loved.

A Promise of Discipline

God's covenant also comes with a promise of discipline because He will not let sin rule over His beloved. Hebrews 12 makes it clear that God disciplines those whom He loves as a good father disciplines His son. This produces the fruit of righteousness. *"No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained"*

by it” (Hebrews 12:11). Discipline isn’t delightful. Discipline is painful, slow, and heartbreaking, but crucial for godliness.

Parenting requires the hard work of discipline, motivated—in the context of a covenant—by love. This is an area parents need to be watchful. We can discipline out of pride, correcting our child so they don’t embarrass the family. We can discipline out of anger when we lose our temper. Godly discipline, however, is driven by love with the aim of producing the fruit of righteousness. Discipline is not simply about consequences for bad behavior, but it is committing to help our children grow in godliness.

“Presence is central to everything God calls us to be, and everything our children need from us.”

A Promise of Presence

When God establishes His covenant, He promises His presence. *“I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. And they will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God”* (Exodus 29:45-26).

Presence is central to everything God calls us to be, and everything our children need from us. We keep our promise to God and our children by making presence a priority. Keep it simple. Eat together, play together, laugh together, cry together, watch movies together, and even endure boredom together. Invest in your child by doing what they love. You’ll notice how often we get a chance for meaningful conversations and experiences simply because we commit to being present.

The Legacy We Leave

I have a Bible I plan to give to my sons one day. I’ve been writing notes in the margin of this Bible and only one note is written in ink. Beside Proverbs

23:24, (*"The father of a righteous son will rejoice greatly, and one who fathers a wise son will delight in him"*), I wrote: "Learn wisdom in Christ, pass it on to [my sons' names]." This is written in ink so that I can never erase it.

One day I hope my sons take that Bible, open it to Proverbs 23:24, and see their names beside this verse. I hope they will see my longing for them to know Christ. I hope they see how deeply I treasure seeing them walking in wisdom. I hope they will read it and forgive me for all the ways I have fallen short and let them down. I hope they see it and know the joyful privilege I have of being their dad.

Taking our cues from scripture won't make parenting easy, but it makes it meaningful. May God grant us the grace to raise our children well—for their good, for our joy, and for His glory.

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***Sola Scriptura* and the Church: Why Scripture Still Matters**

By Dave Jenkins



Writing an article on *Sola Scriptura* and the Church might seem **weird**, but I can tell you that few topics today are as least considered or as crucial as this one. Few things are more vital for us to

bring to bear on our lives and ministries than the doctrine of Scripture. We are living in a day when the Bible is under attack from both inside and outside the Church in a multi-pronged assault via topics like gender, sexuality, church government, ministry philosophy, social justice, and so much more. One of the critical aspects I want to cover in this article is how the doctrine of Scripture will be brought to bear on the life of the Christian and the Church.

Scripture Truly Matters for All of Life

Scripture is how we know who God is and how He has revealed Himself. Scripture is how we know who Jesus Christ is, what He has come to do, what He has done, and how He will return at the right time, as appointed by God the Father. It is essential to say that a pastor's view of Scripture will affect how he preaches the Word. The conviction that pastors (and teachers) are to preach and teach line by line, text by text, through books of the Bible finds its foundation in the fact that we believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient, clear, and binding Word of God.

Further, we must understand that expository preaching is vital to the health and growth of the local church and the people therein, in every place and for all time. Expository preaching and our view of Scripture are tied together, so it is possible to say that our view of the Bible will affect our view of preaching.

Unfortunately, in the world today, we see many people choosing not to ground their life and ministry in the Word. Now more than ever, ministry philosophies rooted in the American business model are taking hold. Worldly self-help techniques and philosophies are leading way to counsel people in our local churches. We are seeing the rise of movements that dishonor the God of the Word—those that deny the authority of the Scripture. Movements such as the New Apostolic Reformation, the social justice revolution, the “gay Christian” movement, and more, all have at their root one idea: the Bible is true in so far as it goes along with the culture, but is not valid in everything it says. Some in the Church have even suggested that the parts of the Bible about gender and sexuality should be removed. With the removal of such texts, they would no longer have to do “hermeneutic gymnastics” to force the Bible to be “culturally acceptable”, and thus would not have to deal with what the biblical text says, but purposefully explain away the references without ever dealing with them. This also reveals an agenda that is prevalent in the Church, which led me to write this ar-

ticle to you today.

As Christians, we are to believe all that Scripture says. Scripture is the only way to know God as He has specifically revealed Himself. This affects the Church because, as Christians, we have been called out of the darkness and into the light of God's Son, Jesus. We have been transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, the God of grace has declared us not guilty. We are His, and He is ours. We are indwelt by the Spirit. We are united to Him by faith in the Son. We are held fast by the King who holds the world and rules all of history by the Word of His power. Such truth is such a comfort because it means that, despite all that is going on, all the false teaching occurring, and all the many people who have fallen away, God knows this too and is not surprised.

Some people today believe that God has changed, but this isn't true. Instead, what we see in Scripture is that God is *unchanging*. Theologians call this the immutability of God, simply meaning that God is unchanging, and therefore we can trust Him. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:5, 9). Titus 1:2 says that God never lies. This means that because God has spoken through the Scriptures, we can know Him (His words are true), and since God never changes, we can take Him at His Word (His promises are sure). God is faithful to His Word. Scripture has a clear point: to help us know God, grow in Christ, and to help us become more like Jesus. Whether you are personally reading the Word or hearing it preached, Scripture is enough—for you personally, and for the Church.

“These same Scriptures reveal to each believer a sufficient Christ.”

These same Scriptures reveal to each believer a sufficient Christ. In the midst of your parenting or marriage challenges, the trials that come at all of us,

or the hurt and pain that is inevitable in a fallen world, you can trust your God.

“Do not listen to the world’s lies that you need to give your child over to a godless education system and succumb to cultural accommodation.”

You can know this because God has told you what to expect. In John 16:33, Jesus tells us that we can expect trouble in this world. Further, James 1:2-3 tells us that we should consider trials a source of joy. In fact, one of the fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5:22 is *joy*. The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, is producing joy in you. Through the trials of your life (just as in the good times), Christ is to be honored and worshipped.

He allows such struggles to come so that you will become matured in the faith and be helpful to others, while giving Him glory and honor. That is profoundly encouraging. And this brings me to how the doctrine of Scripture relates to the Church.

The Relationship Between Scripture and the Church

As Christians, we are brought into the Body of Christ, the Church, once we are saved through our faith in Him. We were once enemies of God, but now we are a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9-10). Christians are to read, study, meditate upon, and memorize the Word. In addition to our private times of worship, we are also called to gather together under the Word in local assemblies, shepherded by biblically qualified male pastors who preach, teach, care for the flock of God. These men are not super-Christians—there is no such thing—but they are worthy of imitation because they have grown to be mature men of the Word, tested by time, season, and their doctrine and life.

Whether you are a pastor or church member, you can be of help to others. If you are a parent, this is done by raising your children in the Lord. Scripture is

enough to help you train your child. Do not listen to the world's lies that you need to give your child over to a godless education system and succumb to cultural accommodation.

Church Shepherds, you don't need to listen to the majority of the publishing industry, which tells you that you must listen to the latest fad, philosophy, or trend to "grow your church". Scripture is enough; stand fast upon the Word and preach it (in and out of season).

Dear Christian, you do not need the latest Christian marriage book or marriage conference to tell you how to have the best marriage possible. Those books can help you, but your reliance should be upon Scripture.

Men, you must lead your wife (and children) in family worship where you study the Word, sing it, pray it, and fellowship together around it. Scripture is enough for our marriages, families, churches, and for all of life.

Trusting Scripture in All of Life

This leads me to my last point, which is the most critical. Scripture is sufficient for everything in our lives and ministries. "Sure," you say, "I know that." But I must ask, "Do you *really* know it?" Are you intimately acquainted with the Scriptures? Are you growing in your understanding and skillful exposition of the Word? If someone was to spend the day with you, could they honestly tell something different about you? Would they be pointed to Christ just by watching your life and seeing how you speak to and treat others? Or would they see more of you and less of Christ? What would your spouse say to those questions? Have you ever asked? Do others in your local church see more of you or more of Christ being formed in you? If the answer is you over Christ, we must return to the original question at the beginning of this paragraph: do you *really* know that Scripture is sufficient for everything in our lives and ministries?

The sufficiency of Scripture has too often been given intellectual assent by Christians. But we are seeing the sufficiency of Scripture under assault by inte-

grating the Bible with psychology. We are witnessing the attack of Scripture by those who claim they need visions, dreams, and “words from God” outside of the Bible. We also see it under attack from the rise of New Age practices that are sneaking into the Church. We are seeing the sufficiency of Scripture under assault today in the publishing industry. We are witnessing books that claim to be “helpful to people”. All you need to do is look at the list produced by the Evangelical Christian Publishing Association of the most sold “Christian” books every year . Look at the top “Christian” shows on Apple Podcasts. Then lay that over with the “State of Theology” study published every other year by Ligonier Ministries with the help of Lifeway Research. Next look at the current biblical and theological illiteracy statistics from Lifeway Research and the American Bible study. Look at the statistics published by the Worldview Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Then you can see that the authority of Scripture is under attack today and that people are actively undermining the sufficiency of Scripture through their doctrine and practice in every way, shape, and form.

Despite these abysmal facts, however, you can still be encouraged. The Lord is not surprised by these attacks. There have always been false teachers who have sought to come into the church. Second Peter, chapter 2 tells us about these false teachers. Jude 3 tells us to contend for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. We are to stand fast on the Word of God and always to be ready to give an answer for a reason for our hope, while doing so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). The Lord is building His Church. There will always be those who want to destroy the Church and/or cause it harm. Still, the Lord is sovereign over the Church; He is building it every second of every day, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The Lord is using your faithfulness to the Word wherever you are. Whatever your station or title, Christian, be faithful to the Word, declare Christ from its pages, and engage in making disciples who make disciples, wherever the Lord has placed you vocationally.

Closing Thoughts

The Lord will use your faithfulness to bring people to repentance and faith in the name of Jesus, through your faithfulness to His Word. Be faithful in your attendance at church every Lord's Day (as often as your ability allows).

If you are a pastor, preach the Word faithfully and care for the people He has entrusted you with. If you are a blogger or podcaster, do not covet more subscribers/listeners for your blog or podcast. Focus on ministering to people through audio, written, and video mediums. No matter your platform, station, or title, be faithful to the Word and declare the glory of Christ.

Prayerfully entrust your efforts to the Spirit to bring fruit, trusting that He will use your efforts to help others grow and change, as the Lord is using His Word to grow and change you. Only then will we see people grow as God has designed, according to His Word.

And this is precisely why the doctrine of Scripture matters for the Christian personally and for the Church corporately. As members of the professing Church, may we stand on the Word of God and, without apology or compromise, let us preach and teach the Word of God wherever He has placed us. With every opportunity, may we point people away from themselves (and ourselves) and to the glory of Christ, who alone can help them amid their burdens and troubles. He is enough, and we know this because the Scripture is sufficient; it is now and always will be. Be faithful to the Word and Christ, aiming your life to build up the Church. Only then will you grow yourself in Christ, be ultimately useful to your Master Jesus, and be a help to others around you.

Biblical Meditation: The Goal and Purpose for the Christian

By Dave Jenkins



Psalm 1:2 says that the blessed man delights in the law of the

Lord. Those who are godly delight to read and study the Word. The contrast between the righteous and the wicked in Psalm 1:1-2 is between those who are

in love with sin and those who love God. The wicked is described in Psalm 1:1 as he who loves and follows sin's way—the opposite of the “blessed” man. The righteous (“blessed”) man in Psalm 1:2, loves the Lord and seeks to know Him as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. Not only do the godly love to read and study the Bible, but they delight in meditating on the law—that is, on the Word of God—which brings us to our second point in Psalm 1:2, which says, “...but

his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

The Word of God releases its flavor as we chew on it over time. The word "meditate" means to murmur, mutter, speak, muse, or imagine, and carries with it the idea of internally brooding over something in the heart. Meditation has the sense of talking to yourself, speaking under your breath as you ponder God's Word. This is also an imperfect verb, which suggests that this is an ongoing action; we consider God's Word "day and night" (Psalm 1:2), like a program constantly running in the background on a computer.

Psalm 1:2 is concerned with the idea that the godly person practices regular communion with God as the habit of his life. One of the best reasons for memorizing the Scriptures is to fuel biblical meditation. When we memorize a verse of Scripture, we can meditate on it anytime, day or night. Psalm 119:97 says, "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day."

In Joshua 1:8, we see the connection between success and the practice of meditation when it says, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

Every Christian who wants to grow in grace meditates on the Word and thinks deeply about the Scriptures. Real success is not granted to those who stare off into space (with an empty mind), but instead to those who stare deep into the Word of God. Biblical meditation invites Christians into the world of God through the Scriptures, where real refreshment and joy begin.

The fruit of biblical meditation is action. As we hear, read, study, and memorize the Word, the power of Scripture, fueled by biblical meditation, inflames and enlarges our souls. The more we engage in biblical meditation, the more we see the Word giving off its heat onto us, illuminating its truth to us through the Holy Spirit, whose Word provides insight and understanding, resulting in a passion for obedience to God by His grace. Thomas Watson pointed-

ly notes, *“The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.”*

Biblical meditation is necessary for *every* Christian. Biblical meditation provides us spiritual discernment, improves our Bible reading and prayer lives, applies the general truths of the Bible personally and specifically, strengthens our hearts by focusing on biblical truths, and provides lasting benefit from dwelling on the truths we know from the Word.

Thomas Watson said, *“Without meditation, the truth of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation, all is lost; meditation imprints and fastens a truth in the mind. As a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart. Without meditation the word preached may increase notion not affection.”*

Biblical meditation is where we fill our minds with God’s truth and where our hearts and minds are inflamed with a passion for God. As George Mueller said, *“The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts.”* Mueller is right—how we view the Bible affects what we do with the Bible. It’s what we do with the Word of God and how we view it and believe it that will lead to having the right actions in light of biblical truth.

And that’s why hearing, reading, and studying the Bible is so essential and also why biblical meditation is so critical.

These are lifelong pursuits, eternal things. So, we press on and grow, because if we have the correct view of the Bible, we’ll hold it in the right place in our hearts, thoughts, and lives. Thomas Watson once said, *“It is better to meditate on one sermon than hear five sermons. Many complain that they do not profit from sermons;*

“Meditating on Scripture versus merely hearing it is the difference between true and false grace in a person’s heart.”

this may be the chief reason, because they do not chew on the cud; they do not meditate on what they have heard."

Meditating on Scripture versus merely hearing it is the difference between true and false grace in a person's heart. Thomas Watson rightly states, "No man is converted without meditation for everyone that is converted hears the truth is convinced, considers and meditates upon them and is affected with them." Bates, in his work titled, *On Divine Meditation*, remarks that David was called a man after God's own heart. *After all, he meditated because he was of the heavenly frame and temper of his spirit.*

Nathan Ranew, in his book, *Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation*, gave this statement:

"Not a watch set in the night but he had his meditation. Oh, most admirable frame of spirit. A king and a daily meditator, and a night mediator also. It was not family business, nor state affairs, nor war's urgencies, and difficulties that so could crowd in and impose his thoughts, but he would have his spiritual retreats, his soul-repasts, in meditation, and mount up to heaven by it."

And likewise, Richard Baxter said:

"And why so much preaching lost among us, and professors can run from sermon to sermon and are never weary of hearing or reading and yet have such languishing, starved souls, I know no truer or greater cause than their ignorance and unconscious neglect of meditation."

Thomas Boston advised that after hearing the word preached, [one should] *immediately begin meditation on it in your hearts, and yet you will find your memories surprisingly strengthened.*

Richard Greenham instructed, *"If we meditate of those general rules which we have heard out of the word, we shall many times see more clearly into the truth of it."*

James Ussher upholds these thoughts as well when he states, *"Thus to meditate one hour spent thus is more worth than a thousand sermons and this is no debasing of the word but an honor to it. Thus the word is particularly applied, laid home."*

Biblical Christian meditation is possible because of the grace of the Lord, in whom we can trust because He is wholly good, trustworthy, righteous, loving, and just in all His ways.

Philippians 4:8 encourages believers in this way, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* The word “think” here means to “to consider, take into account, weigh, meditate on.”

Gerald Hawthorne notes the Apostle Paul has asked the church at Philippi (and by extension us as well) to *“continuously to focus their minds on these things, to give full critical attention to them, and so to reflect carefully upon them with an action-provoking kind of meditation. It was not his desire to ask them merely to think about such noble matters without putting them into practice in their lives.”*

“God has ordained biblical meditation as a means for our growth in grace and the renewal of our minds.”

The entirety of Scripture is lovely and useful for our growth in the grace of God. Edmund Calamy shared some practical rules for choosing the right subjects for biblical meditation. He said the first biblical meditation should be simply picking out easy topics to meditate upon, such as the love of Jesus and His death on the cross.

Second, biblical meditation should be balanced, according to Calamy. He instructed that one should not get stuck on one subject but vary in your choices for biblical meditation. Third, be practical in your biblical meditation by choosing topics that stir your heart to greater holiness and godliness. Fourth, be fitting in your biblical meditation by selecting subjects that are most appropriate to your current condition.

One of his contemporaries, Thomas Manton, explained that topics of bibli-

cal meditation must primarily be those that are profitable and practical rather than those that are speculative, *“The mind of man is the mill of God not to grind chaff but wheat. Matters practical are there to ground for bread to the soul; they that hunt after fancies do but misemploy their thoughts.”*

Wilhelmus à Brakel encouraged the believer to choose for meditation divine matters of which he has prior acquaintance. By that, he meant that personal meditation is not the time for inquisitive thinking, but rather practical biblical meditation upon matters known to some degree.

Here are some helpful directions: First, choose one subject at a time, yet remain varied in your daily choices. Second, choose an appropriate subject that is suitable to your state of mind and circumstances of life. Lastly, choose a familiar subject that will practically benefit and advance your personal godliness.

Psalm 1 clearly distinguishes between the path of those who are wicked and godly, with the dividing line being one’s thinking, reasoning, and meditation. This is because what we think comes from our hearts and subsequently affects our behavior. Another way to say this is that our thoughts indicate the spiritual direction of our lives.

One cannot become a godly, stable Christian without biblical meditation. God promises that the one who meditates will become a “well-watered tree”. Thomas Watson says, *“It gives us a true account why there are so few godly Christians in the world, namely there are so few meditating Christians.”* Many hear sermons, read Christian books, observe a semblance of Bible reading, and listen to Christian music, yet remain weak in holiness, love, and service. We must ponder why and care about the conclusions! The answer is a lack of serious thinking about the Word, while also being constantly distracted by a 24/7 new cycle and a life dominated by entertainment.

God has ordained biblical meditation as a means for our growth in grace and the renewal of our minds. That is why Thomas Watson said, *“A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without weapons or a workman without tools.”* God

graciously works practical change through the means of His Word, which His Spirit carries deeper into our hearts and lives, bringing biblical change. One cannot refuse to think about what is right and lovely and good, as Philippians 4:8 says, and still expect to do what Philippians 2:12-13 says, *“to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”*

Personal growth and practicing meditation are twins that cannot be separated from each other apart from each of their deaths. Nathan Ranew explains, *“Meditation is necessary to be a keeper out of evil and vain thoughts and dislodge them.”* Meditation is a positive assault against sins in one’s life it works with the goal of replacing them with biblical truth and sincerity. Biblical meditation is how lasting change, growth in grace, and victory over sin takes place. Biblical meditation is the replacement of vain thoughts with the renewal of one’s spirit.

Ephesians 4:20-23 also encourages believers in like manner: *“But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Ranew also wrote, *“Meditation is to be exercised not only as an exclusive of bad thoughts, but for an instruction of good thoughts, good thoughts in a way for an arriving at habitual heavenly mindedness.”*

The purpose of memorizing and meditating on the Word of God is for the sake of proper application. Perhaps you can’t possibly add another moment of your time to Scripture reading and memorization; I get it, and I understand. Take what time you do have to spend in the Word and focus on it. Read less, but use a more focused method to read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Word. You can meditate any time on the Word (there is no specific minute or hour). Unlike how we need sleep as finite creatures, the Lord is infinite and doesn’t need time to sleep. The best time to encounter the Word of God occurs as

we read and delight in Him.

You need to delightfully read and meditate on the Word to help you with your busyness, to help you with your responsibilities in life, to help you with a clouded mind, and wandering thoughts, feelings of guilt and discomfort, living for passing pleasure, being distracted by technology and entertainment, the influence of ungodly friends, help with your relationships, and your stagnant growth in the grace of God. Biblical meditation will help you to be grounded in the good soil of the Word of God. The Holy Spirit desires to take the Word you hear, read, meditate upon, and memorize, and drive it deeper into your life so that you will grow in the grace of God.

“The Holy Spirit desires to take the Word you hear, read, meditate upon, and memorize, and drive it deeper into your life so that you will grow in the grace of God.”

David Dickson remarks, *“The blessed man maketh the word of God in holy Scripture to be his counselor concerning the remedy of sin and misery and to be the rule to walk by till his blessedness be perfected; for the Scripture to him for the obedience of faith is a law and that fenced with supreme authority is the law of the Lord. In that measure that a man is godly and blessed he maketh the word of God which holdeth forth the way of reconciliation with God through the Messiah Christ, the way of growing in communion with God through him the matter of his chief delight and contentment, his delight is in the law of the Lord. In the measure that a man delighteth in the law of the Lord he verseth himself therein upon all occasions in his law doth he meditate day and night.”*

And John Calvin rightly sums up this article by saying, *“From his characterizing the godly as delighting in the law of the Lord, we may learn that force or servile obedience is not at all acceptable to God and that those only are worthy students of the law who come to it with a cheerful mind, and are so delighted with its instructions as to account nothing more desirable with its instructions as to account nothing more desira-*

ble or delicious than to make progress therein. From this love of the law process constant meditation upon it which the prophet mentions as the last clause of verse 2; for all who are truly actuated by love to the law must feel pleasure in the diligent study of it."

We don't need to empty our minds as Eastern mysticism and "Christian mysticism" suggest today. All we need is the application of *Sola Scriptura* as we put into practice daily meditation upon God's Word. No more excuses, Dear Christian; take these instructions and begin applying them to your life today, for the glory of God.

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Recommended Reading on *Sola Scriptura*

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of *Sola Scriptura*. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that, hopefully, readers of this issue will grow in their understanding of it so they can stand fast on the Word of God.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

Doctrine of Scripture:

- *The Word Matters* by Dave Jenkins
- *The Word Explored* by Dave Jenkins
- *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung
- *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity* by James White
- *Scripture Alone* by R.C. Sproul
- *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* by J.I. Packer
- *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* by J.I. Packer
- *Truth and Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* by J.I. Packer
- *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung
- *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* by Michael Kruger

- *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* by G.K. Beale
- *The Doctrine of the Word of God* by John Frame
- *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* by Vern Poythress
- *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* by Vern Poythress
- *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* by B.B. Warfield
- *Understanding Scripture: An Overview of the Bible's Origin, Reliability, and Meaning* by Drs. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas Schreiner
- *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *The Divine Original: Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (collected works) by John Owen
- *Thy Word is Truth* by E.J. Young
- *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena (Vol. 1)* by Herman Bavinck
- *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity* by James White
- *Scripture Alone* by R.C. Sproul
- *God, Revelation, and Authority* by Carl Henry

Discernment:

- *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* by Tim Challies
- *Defining Deception* by Costi Hinn and Anthony Wood

Guidance:

- *Can I Know God's Will?* by R.C. Sproul

- *God's Will: Finding Guidance for Everyday Decisions* by J.I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom

Preaching:

- *Preaching and Preachers* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell
- *How to Preach Biblically* by John MacArthur and The Master's Seminary Faculty

Good Study Bibles:

- English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible
- Reformation Study Bible
- MacArthur Study Bible

I hope you'll find these resources helpful as I have.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

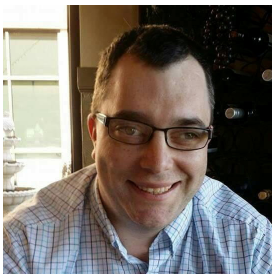
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

About the Authors:



Justin Huffman

Justin Huffman is a graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary and pastored churches in the States for over 15 years. He is currently lead pastor of Morningstar Christian Fellowship in Toronto, where he lives with his wife Chau and their four children. Justin is the author of the “Daily Devotion” app, as well as numerous books and articles, including his newest book, *Behold: an Invitation to Wonder*. Connect with him at <http://justinhuffman.org/>.



Dave Jenkins

Dave Jenkins is the Executive Director of Servants of Grace Ministries, and the Executive Editor of *Theology for Life Magazine*, and author of *The Word Explored: The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy and What to do About It*. Dave received his M.A.R. and M. Div. through Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Sarah, attend Covenant Life Fellowship in Roseburg, Oregon. Check out <http://servantsofgrace.org> for more information.



Joey Tomlinson

Joey Tomlinson (D. Min., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is a husband, father, and pastor at a local church in Newport News, Virginia. He blogs regularly on broadoakpiety.org and hosts a weekly podcast called The Broad Oak Piety Podcast with another local pastor in the community.



Scott Hurst

Scott Hurst pastors at Northminster Baptist Church in Toronto. He enjoys sports, books, and spending time with his wife and their two boys. Keep up with his writing at *Write to Understand*.

About the Authors (Cont'd):



Bill Farley

Bill Farley is a retired pastor and church planter. He has been married to his best friend, Judy, since 1971. They have five children and 22 grandchildren. Bill is the author of seven books, including *Gospel-Powered Humility* (P&R), *Gospel-Powered Parenting* (P&R), and *Marriage in Paradise* (Pinnacle), *Secret to Spiritual Joy* (Cruciform), *Outrageous Mercy* (P&R), and *Hidden In the Gospel* (P&R). He blogs regularly at <http://www.williamfarley.com/>.



Jacob Tanner

Jacob Tanner is a husband, father, and pastor, living in Pennsylvania. Holding to the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, Jacob is focused on both evangelism and reformation. He is the founder of the Sound of Truth Ministries, where they have regular podcasts and preaches whenever the opportunity arises. His passion and motto are, "To know Christ and make Him known because He has made us His own." He can be found spending time with his family or with a book in his hands in his free time.



Parker Reardon

Parker Reardon (D. Min., Word of Life Bible Institute) has been serving in ministry for over 20 years. Parker has been happily married to his wife, Cynthia, for 25 years and the Lord has graciously given them bookends of girls, with 5 boys between them. He currently also serves as counselor/discipler at Sovereign Grace Biblical Counseling. He and his family live in Southern Oregon.

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Executive Editor:

Dave Jenkins

E-mail: dave@servantsofgrace.org

Design Coordinator & Editor:

Sarah Jenkins

Email: sarah@servantsofgrace.org