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### **Why Does Sola Scriptura Still Matter?**

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Ezekiel 13:3–9

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The Protestant Reformation is rightly regarded as the greatest revival in the last thousand years of church history—a movement so massive it radically altered the course of Western civilization. Names like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox are still well-known today, five centuries after they lived. Through their writings and sermons, these courageous Reformers—and others like them—left an enduring legacy for the generations of believers who have followed them.

But the true power behind the Reformation did not flow from any one man or group of men. To be sure, the Reformers took bold stands and offered themselves as sacrifices for the cause of the gospel. But, even so, the sweeping triumph of sixteenth-century revival cannot ultimately be credited to either their incredible acts of valor or their brilliant works of scholarship. No, the Reformation can only be explained by something far more profound: a force infinitely more potent than anything mere mortals can produce on their own.

Like any true revival, the Reformation was the inevitable and explosive consequence of the Word of God crashing like a massive tidal wave against the thin barricades of man-made tradition and hypocritical religion. As the common people of Europe gained access to the Scriptures in their own language, the Spirit of God used that timeless truth to convict their hearts and convert their souls. The result was utterly transformative, not only for the lives of individual sinners, but for the entire continent on which they resided.

The principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) was the Reformers' way of acknowledging that the unstoppable power behind the explosive advance of religious reform was the Spirit-empowered Word of God.

For the reformers, *sola Scriptura* meant that the Bible was the only divinely revealed Word and therefore the believer's true authority for sound doctrine and righteous living. They understood the Word of God to be powerful, life-altering, and wholly sufficient "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Like the church fathers who had come before them, they rightly viewed God's Word as the authoritative foundation for their Christian faith. They embraced the inerrancy, infallibility, and historical accuracy of Scripture without question, gladly submitting to its divine truth.

Though they were part of a major social upheaval, the reformers understood that the real battle was not over politics, money, or land. It was a fight for biblical truth. And as the truth of the gospel shone forth, empowered by the Holy Spirit, it ignited the flames of revival.

**Honoring the Author of the Word**

That spirit of uncompromised commitment to God's Word is mostly absent from the evangelical landscape today. While many give lip service to the primacy of Scripture, the popular trends in the church tend to push aside the standard of God's Word, softening the truth or suppressing it altogether for the sake of attracting the world.

But let's be clear: Any movement that does not honor God's Word cannot rightfully claim to honor Him. If we are to reverence the omnipotent Sovereign of the universe, we must wholly submit to the things He has spoken (Hebrews 1:1–2). Anything less is to treat Him with contempt and rebel against His lordship. Nothing is more offensive to the Author of Scripture than to disregard, deny, or distort the truth He has revealed (Revelation 22:18–19). To mishandle the Word of God is to misrepresent the One who wrote it. To reject its claims is to call Him a liar. To ignore its message is to snub that which the Holy Spirit inspired.

As God's perfect revelation, the Bible reflects the glorious character of its Author. Because He is the God of truth, His Word is infallible. Because He cannot lie, His Word is inerrant. Because He is the King of kings, His Word is absolute and supreme. Those who wish to please Him must obey His Word. Conversely, those who fail to honor the Scriptures above every other truth-claim dishonor God Himself.

Because the Reformers recognized Jesus Christ alone as the Head of the church, they gladly submitted to His Word as the sole authority within the church. Thus, they acknowledged what all true believers throughout history have affirmed—that the Word of God alone is our supreme rule for life and doctrine. Consequently, they also confronted any false authority that might attempt to usurp Scripture's rightful place; and in so doing, they exposed the corruption of the entire Roman Catholic system.

## **Defending the Faith**

Believers today are likewise called to defend the truth against all who would seek to undermine the authority of Scripture. As Paul wrote, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5, ESV). Jude similarly instructed his readers to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). In referring to "the faith," Jude was not pointing to an indefinable body of religious doctrines; rather, he was speaking of the objective truths of Scripture that comprise the Christian faith (cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 1:13–14).

The authors of the New Testament did not discover the truths of the Christian faith through mystical religious experiences. Rather God, with finality and certainty, delivered His complete body of revelation in Scripture. Any system that claims new revelation or new doctrine must be disregarded as false (Revelation 22:18–19). God's Word is all-sufficient; it is all that believers need as they contend for the faith and oppose apostasy within the church.

From the very beginning, the battle between good and evil has been a battle for the truth. The serpent, in the Garden of Eden, began his temptation by questioning the truthfulness of God's words. Casting doubt on the straightforward revelation of God has been Satan's tactic ever since (cf. John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:3–4).

With eternity at stake, it is no wonder that Scripture reserves its harshest words of condemnation for those who would put lies in the mouth of God. The serpent was immediately cursed in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:14), and Satan told of his inevitable demise (v. 15). In Old Testament Israel, false prophecy was a capital offense (Deuteronomy 13:5, 10), a point vividly illustrated by Elijah's slaughter of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal following the showdown on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:19, 40). But the Israelites often failed to expel false prophets; and by welcoming error into their midst, they also invited God's judgment (Jeremiah 5:29–31). Consider the Lord's attitude towards those who would exchange His true Word for a counterfeit:

Thus says the Lord God, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. . . . They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The Lord declares,' when the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word. Did you not see a false vision and speak a lying divination when you said, 'The Lord declares,' but it is not I who have spoken?" Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Because you have spoken falsehood and seen a lie, therefore behold, I am against you," declares the Lord God. "So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord God." (Ezekiel 13:3-9; cf., Isaiah 30:9-13; Jeremiah 5:29-31)

The point of that passage is unmistakable: God hates those who misrepresent His Word or speak lies in His name. The New Testament responds to false prophets with equal severity (cf. 1 Timothy 6:3–5; 2 Timothy 3:1–9; 1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7–11). God does not tolerate those who falsify or fake divine revelation. It is an offense He takes personally, and His retribution is swift and deadly. To sabotage biblical truth in any way—by adding to it, subtracting from it, or mixing it with error—is to invite divine wrath (Galatians 1:9; 2 John 9–11). Any distortion of the Word is an affront against the Trinity, and especially against the Spirit of God because of His intimate relationship to the Scriptures.

Martin Luther put it this way, "Whenever you hear anyone boast that he has something by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it has no basis in God's Word, no matter what it may be, tell him that this is the work of the devil." [1] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 23, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 173-174. And elsewhere, "Whatever does not have its origin in the Scriptures is surely from the devil himself." [2] *Luther's Works*, vol. 36, 144.

The battle cry of *sola Scriptura* harkens back to a bygone era—one that might seem outdated and irrelevant. But the church today must rekindle the Reformers' commitment to the purity and authority of God's Word, and vigorously defend it from corruption and compromise. God's truth is in the crosshairs of a world in love with its sin, and we need to be all the more committed to upholding Scripture as the true standard and final authority.



(Adapted from [Strange Fire](#).)

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