

On April 18, 1521, standing before an imperial court called the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther felt the pressure. He'd traveled to Worms, Germany to defend his faith before the Catholic church, but he quickly realized there would be no discussion—just a verdict. If he recanted-- denied his teachings-- he could go free. If he clung to his beliefs, he'd be declared a heretic, and almost certainly burned alive at the stake. As he stood next to a pile of his writings, the question was lobbed like a live grenade. "Will you recant or not?" "Can you, one man, call into question the tradition of the entire Catholic church?"

Would Luther scamper back to the Pope like a scared dog? Or would he stand strong? His answer would become an iconic phrase of the Reformation. ***"Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me."*** How could Luther stand firm under that pressure? Because of this (hold up Bible). Because while the Catholic church was determined to mine truth from the opinions of Pope and council even if it was absent from Scripture, Luther believed that the only source of truth was ***Sola Scriptura***--- by ***Scripture Alone***.

That was an unpopular idea at Luther's time when the Pope was considered equal to, if not greater than, the Scriptures in determining truth. It's an unpopular teaching today too, when society encourages each individual to define "truth" for themselves. Yet, as we study the Scriptures to learn about the Scriptures, we'll discover why Sola Scriptura trumps subjective truth, and the implications of "Scripture Alone" on both our earthly and eternal lives. **Scripture Alone—For Life and Salvation.**

As Luther risked his life at Worms to stand on Scripture Alone, the Apostle Paul wrote this second letter to his young protégé and fellow pastor Timothy, while staring down death. Writing from a dungeon in Rome, awaiting execution for sharing the hope of Jesus, this last letter is often called Paul's last will and testament. And what is Paul's final charge? The most important thing he could say in his final letter before he was killed for the Gospel? ***"Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of."*** Stand firm in the Word.

But why would Paul tell Timothy to stand firmly on the Scriptures alone, when doing so promised persecution, even death? Paul even admits, ***"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted?"***

Paul and Luther both stood firmly on the Scriptures, because they knew they were the only source of eternal truth. As Paul tells Timothy, ***"From infancy, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."*** Paul charges Timothy to stand firm and ***"preach the Word,"*** because he knew that the Scriptures weren't just the words or opinions of sinful, fallible men. He reminds Timothy, ***"All Scripture is God-breathed."***

But what exactly does that mean? This is called the doctrine of "Inspiration." Paul teaches us here that God "inspired" the men who wrote the books of the Bible. Not "inspired" like me eating a delicious steak, and feeling inspired to give the restaurant a 5-star review on Yelp. Not "inspired" like God is so wonderful that these men felt compelled to record their feelings about him. If it was that kind of inspiration, the Bible would just be the words of men.

The term inspiration comes from two Latin words, "in" and "spiro" meaning, "breathed into." Inspiration means that the Holy Spirit "breathed into" the writers the very words God wanted them to write. From Moses, who wrote Genesis, to the Apostle John who recorded Revelation, ***"prophecy never had its origin in the will of***

man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” as Peter wrote... by God’s inspiration. Therefore, the Scriptures on which Paul and Luther firmly stood, are not the feelings or opinions of men, but the words of God himself!

The implications of that truth are immense for our lives, and our salvation! First, note what Paul writes. **“All Scripture is God-breathed.”** That 3-letter word, all, changes everything, doesn’t it? Not some Scripture. Not most of Scripture. ALL of Scripture is God’s Word.

If I told you, “I ordered a pizza, and I want you to eat all of it,” I can’t be upset when I find the box empty. All means all! And if God says that ALL of Scripture comes from him, we can’t be buffet line Christians. If you go to Golden Corral, you can fill your plate with chicken wings, ribs, steak, mashed potatoes and everything you like. And you can skip the stuff you don’t like, like the weird smelling pasta salad or lima beans.

But if all Scripture is God-breathed, we can’t walk through the Bible and say, “I like the part about God’s love, so I’ll take a big scoop of that. And I like Christmas, so I’ll believe in baby Jesus in Bethlehem. But this part about hell, no—I’m gonna leave that. And this whole Creation thing seems too far-fetched, so I’m gonna skip that.” If all of Scripture is God-breathed, and God is the God of truth, we don’t get to choose what is or isn’t truth based on our subjective opinions. We believe all of it, or we deny the truthfulness of God, who says ALL Scripture comes from him.

That’s a very counter-cultural view in today’s subjectively-focused society. A person’s gender, or sexual preference, or path to eternity have become subjective truths we’re told that person should decide for themselves.

But it’s not just our society that desires to be the arbiter of truth. Our own sinful nature wants that control too. We sin when we’ve convinced ourselves we know better than God. Are there certain Biblical truths you try to ignore? Truths you keep buried so your friends won’t know your church teaches that? A pastor, Timothy Keller, once wrote, **“If your god never disagrees with you, you might just be worshiping an idealized version of yourself.”**

A Scripture Alone, God-breathed view of the Bible shapes our lives, thoughts, and actions. Scripture Alone finds us confessing with Luther, **“my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”** My emotions, opinions, and desires become captive to God’s Word. My truth needs to take a back seat to God’s truth. If I pit myself against God, God always wins, because God’s perfect truth trumps my sin-stained thoughts.

Scripture Alone also means that God’s Word is sufficient for our lives and for our salvation. As Luther knew, Scripture is the only perfect, inerrant source of truth. Sinful human Popes or councils didn’t need to add their own false opinions, because Scripture is already complete. Sinful human beings adding their own opinions to the all-sufficient Scriptures and calling it “truth” is like a 2-year old with a paintbrush trying to improve the Mona Lisa! Adding something inferior makes it worse, not better.

Scripture Alone means that God’s Word is always useful and applicable, not dead words that lost their purpose long ago. As Hebrews says, **“The Word of God is living and active.”** That’s why Paul tells Timothy Scripture is **“useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.”** When the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture, God wasn’t just thinking of people dead for millennia. He saw you.

He saw you sitting in that pew; that Bible Study; that Catechism classroom; around that kitchen table, being taught with the Word. He saw you caught in sin, desperately needing your eyes opened by rebuke, to lead you to repentance. He saw you, wracked with guilt, needing the comfort and correction of Words of forgiveness won by Christ. He saw you, stumbling through a world of darkness and subjective morality, desperately trying

to separate the truth from the lies of ***“evil men and impostors who go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*** To train you in righteousness, God placed the truth in your hands, letting you read, hear, and handle that truth every second of every day by his grace.

Scripture Alone means that the Bible is God’s heartfelt love letter to you, not an “Or Current Resident” envelope mindlessly placed in your mailbox. Scripture Alone changes everything for our lives. But even more importantly, Scripture Alone changes everything for our eternal life. As Paul wrote to Timothy, ***“From infancy, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”***

Wise for salvation. There are a lot of books on bookshelves that can make people wise for this world. But there is only one book that can make a person wise for salvation, because the author isn’t a scholar. He’s God. Sola Scriptura sits at the crossroads of the four Reformation “solas.” By grace Alone, God has given us Scripture Alone to teach us about our Savior. Through those Scriptures, the Holy Spirit works saving faith in our hearts, Faith Alone that receives the forgiveness and righteousness won by Christ Alone.

That’s why Paul, Peter, Timothy, Martin Luther, and so many others before us could confidently look death in the eye for the sake of Scripture Alone. Because even if we lose our lives, the Holy Scriptures make us wise for more than just this life. They make us wise for salvation—the promise of eternal life. Scripture Alone...these words from God...they are life!

On Reformation Day, our school kids celebrated 500 years of Reformation grace with some Reformation themed activities. One project included the kids writing “theses” about their faith. If you haven’t yet, walk around the hallway and read some of them. It struck me the other day as I read the statements of faith posted there, that this is what Scripture Alone really means. It means that a bunch of kids, and a bunch of adults with different ages, backgrounds, and personalities can confidently confess their faith, and don’t have to preface them with “I think maybe...” or “I hope that...” or “I’m somewhat sure...” No, our statements of faith are confident “I believes.” Why? Because of Scripture Alone. Because we believers don’t have to wonder, doubt, or second guess our faith. Because God teaches us these truths in His inerrant, inspired Word. Here we stand on God’s Word. We can do no other. Amen.