2 Timothy 3:14-17 *The 5 Solas: Sola Scriptura*

***The Diet of Worms***For the last 3 weeks we have been in this series we are calling the *5 Solas*. We are looking at these 5 Latin slogans that make up the heart of Reformation theology.

And since we are talking about the Reformation—and October is Reformation month—I have been starting each sermon with a story about the days of Martin Luther:

The Reformation began on October 31st, 1517 when Luther posted his 95 theses as a way of beginning a dialogue within the Catholic Church. It is usually pointed out that his original intent was not to start a new branch of Christianity, but to reform the Roman Catholic Church in which he was a monk. But as reactions to his original theses pushed him to defend himself, he found he was moving farther and farther from the established theology of the time.

As Luther engaged in public debates and published writings that were increasingly critical of the church, Pope Leo X’s patience began to run thin. In June of 1520 the Pope published a document in which were outlined 41 errors of Luther and demanded that he publicly renounce those errors or face excommunication from the church. In those days, being shunned by the church meant more than not being able to attend services, it often also carried the penalty of torture and death at the hands of civil authorities.

Instead of recanting, Luther publicly burned the Pope’s document. At that point, as they say, it was on.

The church excommunicated Luther and the Holy Roman Emperor—Charles V--summoned Luther to stand before him. (At that time, the Roman Empire’s power was closely tied to the strength of the church. The emperor perceived a threat to the Roman Church as a threat to his continued reign.) This infamous meeting took place at what is known as the **Diet of Worms.**

This is an admittedly funny name. In this context, the word “Diet” means an assembly of political leaders—kind of like congress. Nobody knows for sure how the word came to be used in this way, but etymologists suspect it has to do with the Latin word for “day”, which is “die.” Thus, a diet can refer to your daily routine, including your daily food allowance. The suspicion is that it also came to describe the daily agenda for an assembly, and eventually became the name by which these assemblies were called. Worms is simply a city in Germany, with no real connection to our English word.

So, disappointingly, this was not a meeting where they decided who was right by holding a contest to see who could eat the most fried worms—despite how cool that would have been. It was a meeting of the emperor with dukes and other officials trying to keep the peace as a theological squabble was quickly taking on political implications.

At any rate, attending this meeting was dangerous for Luther. The civil authority where he lived—Elector Frederick the Wise—was sympathetic to Luther and willing to protect him. But as soon as Luther left Frederick’s territory, there was a good chance he would be seized as a heretic and summarily executed.

Nevertheless, Luther took the chance and through a series of cloak-and-dagger type travels made it to Worms. There he was once again given the opportunity to recant his writings and submit to the Pope’s authority. On April 18, 1521, Luther stood before the assembly, refused to take anything back, and concluded with these words:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. **Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.**

Then, as he turned to sit down, he concluded with these words:

Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.

(text taken from Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*, pg 144)

***Isn’t it Obvious?***This week’s Sola is *Sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone. Scripture is the supreme and final authority on matters of faith and practice within the church. Scripture alone is the final, decisive authority for discerning, defending and teaching the truth of the gospel. As Luther says, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” If there is conflict between human opinion and the teaching of Scripture, Scripture should win every time.

In some ways, this should feel fairly obvious to us. A huge part of our practice as a church is reading, learning and preaching from the Bible. The first week of this series we talked about *Sola Gratia*—Grace Alone. Our text included **Ephesians 2:8-9:**

8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast.

I remember, as I prepared, thinking: how can this get any plainer? How could Christians have ever gotten this wrong? How did they ever get to the point that they could think there was anything they could add to grace? It says you can’t, right there!

And that’s the thing: we are so used to putting Scripture first that we assume that’s how all Christians will think.

But the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages did not adhere to Scripture Alone. Scripture was important to them. They studied and preserved the scriptures. But to the Scriptures they had added hundreds of years of church traditions, council decisions, and papal declarations. The word for this is “**magisterium**.” The magisterium is the belief that the church—particularly the Pope—has the authority to give the authentic interpretation of God’s Word. In the Catholic Church Tradition and Scripture have been placed on equal footing, and the Word of God is believed to come from a combination of the two.

And, as we have seen, this led to the practice and promotion of beliefs such as purgatory, indulgences, veneration of saints, the elevation of Mary, and more. All beliefs that are not supported by Scripture.

A primary driver of the Reformation was the desire to get back to the Bible. Keep in mind that the **printing press had been invented in 1440.** The first printed copy of the Greek New Testament had only arrived in 1516, the year before Luther’s 95 theses. Prior to these two events, every copy of the Bible was hand-written; Bibles were hard to come by; and the vast majority of the population was illiterate. People were dependent on what the church told them in developing their beliefs.

But as printed material became more affordable and the literacy rate rose, Luther’s questions were being asked at a time when more and more people could go to the Bible and look for themselves. The results were—quite literally—revolutionary.

***The Bible on the Bible***Let’s turn to the Bible to see why we value the Bible so much. The most well-known passage about the Bible in the Bible is probably 2 Timothy 3:14-17. This will be our text today. **2 Timothy 3:14-17:**

**14**But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, **15**and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17**so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This is part of Paul’s coaching letter to his young friend Timothy. He’s just been talking about those who are deceitful, evil men who pretend to be Christians while actually leading people away from Christ. But he wants Timothy to be different. He wants Timothy to remain loyal to Christ and what he’s learned about Christ.

And that means, more than anything else, staying close to the Holy Scriptures. The command to Timothy, just as it is to all of us, is to continue in the good news of Jesus by staying with the sacred writings. Don’t go wobbly. Don’t wander from the way. Don’t let other things crowd out and distract from God’s Holy Word.

And there’s a reason. It’s fundamental to what the Scriptures are. I’ll put it like this, our big idea for the day: **God has spoken in Scripture for our good.** That’s the reason to not wander from the way. God has spoken in Scripture for our good.

I’m going to break that down into three parts. God has spoken. God has spoken in Scripture. And God has spoken in Scripture for our good.

***The Elephant has Spoken***First, **God has spoken**. God has revealed Himself to us. **Verse 16:**

**16**All Scripture is God-breathed…

We begin with the notion that God has spoken. That’s what that pretty phrase—“God-breathed” is getting at. When you speak, you are breathing. The way that we produce noise with our voices is by expelling the breath from our lungs.

So when Paul says that scripture is God-breathed he is saying that God has spoken.

Before we move past that, let’s think for a moment about how important that is. One of the fundamental beliefs we have is that there is a huge difference between us and God. God is eternal and infinite and omniscient and holy. We are not. We are quite a bit less than that. And so the idea that we could know and figure out things about God all on our own, using just our human knowledge and understanding, is laughable.

In fact, there’s an old eastern parable about **6 blind men and an elephant** that helps illustrate the difficulties of us figuring out God. I’ve used this parable before, to illustrate an idea many people have about the different world religions.

The story goes that six blind men, who have never before encountered an elephant or had an elephant described to them, stumble upon an elephant. Each ends up near a different part of the animal and begins to feel it and then describe what he thinks it is. One touches the elephant’s leg and declares that it feels like the trunk of a tree, so therefore an elephant must be a tree. Another touches the stomach and declares that an elephant is like a wall. A third grabs an ear and says that an elephant is a fan. And on and on it goes.

The supposed lesson of the story is that we are all blind men when it comes to God. Each of the world religions know part of him, but no single one of them knows the whole story. We are supposed to conclude then that no one world religion knows anymore than any other religion. Really, the story goes, we are all just blind men grasping at different parts of the elephant.

When I’ve shared this story before, my point has always been for us to see that’s not how Jesus talks. When Jesus says—as we saw last week—that He is the way, the truth, and the life and that nobody can come to the Father but through Him, He is explicitly telling us that the elephant story is not a good description of the way things are.

But what I had not really thought of before, until I read it in a book by Kevin DeYoung, is this: what if the elephant talked?

The story is a perfectly good illustration of what happens when humanity stumbles around trying to figure out God on our own. We are all blind and unable to know God by our own devices. But the claim of Christianity is that the elephant talks. God Himself has spoken and revealed His nature and His plans to us. Imagine the elephant saying to the blind men: “That thing that you think is a tree is my leg, I’m really rather tall for an animal. And that thing you think is a wall is my side, because I’m pretty solid. I am an elephant, let me describe myself to you.” (*Taking God at His Word,* p. 68-69)

If the elephant in the story were to speak, it would change everything.

And the Bible says that God has spoken to us.

I’ve said before that the Greek word behind the phrase “God-breathed” is “***theo-pneustos.*** I like to mention that because the word for “breath” is where we get words like “pneumonia” and “pneumatic,” which I think is pretty cool.

Another way of saying this is to say that the Scriptures are ***inspired***(from the Latin *spirare,* “to breathe.” Think of the word “respiration.”) “Inspired” is the word theologians use. Inspiration is the doctrine that says that God is the ultimate Author of the Bible.

But I also want you to know that the original words are arranged in such a way as to indicate that the Scriptures have been “breathed-out” by God, not “breathed-into”. When we say the Bible is “inspired” we don’t mean that God takes these normal words and somehow inspires us through them. We mean that they are the product of God breathing. These words are God’s words.

When I was in seminary there was a lot of respect for old, dead guys. That is, we talked a lot about how some of the great theologians of the past had already done a lot of the hard thinking for us; and we shouldn’t fall into the trap of thinking we were the first people to have insight into God. Some of my professors had even made it a point to pick one old, dead theologian to really go to school on. I thought that was a good idea. I thought I would pick an important theologian, and then make it one of my life’s projects to read everything that person had written. And the theologian I picked was an American from the late 1800s named B.B. Warfield.

In fact, soon after seminary I bought a collection of the complete writings of B. B. Warfield. **Here’s a picture of them**, on my shelf. I have to admit that those are probably the dustiest books in my library. I never really got started on my life’s project. Oh well, maybe there’s still time.

But the reason I picked Warfield is because what he is best known for is defending the integrity, inerrancy, and inspiration of the Bible. And **here’s a quote** from him about this passage:

The Biblical writers do not conceive of the Scriptures as a human product breathed into by the Divine Spirit, and thus heightened in its qualities or endowed with new qualities; but as a Divine product given through the instrumentality of men.

In other words, when you read the Scriptures you are reading the words of God. They are also, mysteriously, the words of David or Moses or Paul or some other human author. But as the product of God’s breath, they are the words of God.

***The Book***Which takes us to point number 2: **God has spoken in Scripture**. This book, the Bible, is the written record of God’s revelation to us.

Again, the first part of **verse 16:**

**16**All Scripture is God-breathed…

Scripture means “writing.” And the Scripture that this verse primarily has in mind is the Holy Writings of the of the Jewish people—what we know as the Old Testament.

The Jewish people have always had a respect for their sacred writings. They are often known as “The People of the Book.” Even during the events described in the Old Testament they already show a commitment to the written words of Moses known as the Torah as well as the writings of the prophets. And consistently, throughout the Old Testament, when they refer to Sacred Scriptures they refer to them as the Word of God.

Likewise, Jesus shows a deep knowledge and commitment to the Sacred Scriptures. He quotes from the Old Testament frequently and with great respect. He often responds to questioners by asking them to consider “what is written” (Matthew 4:4,6 & 10; et al) and even as He is being led to the cross He quotes the Old Testament and expresses his commitment to “fulfill what is written in the Scriptures” (Matthew 26:54; et al).

In **John 10:35** Jesus shows a high view of Scripture when He says:

The Scripture cannot be broken.

Now, you might say: that’s all well and good for the Old Testament; but what about the New Testament? Paul can tell Timothy that the Scriptures are God-breathed and talk about the Bible Timothy knows; but what about the Bible we know? In fact, the passage we’re looking at in 2 Timothy is not part of the Old Testament, so what makes us think it qualifies as Scripture and should be thought of as God’s Word?

Well, it seems that Jesus knew that His followers would also need inspired writings and He prepared for that. In fact, when He chose to name His closest followers “Apostles” it seems He was designating them to be the ones who would record the New Testament scriptures. “Apostle” means “sent one” and it has the sense of a “power of attorney”; that is, it was a person appointed to represent someone else. So **Mark 3:14:**

**14**He appointed twelve—designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.

One of the primary factors in determining which writings made it into the New Testament were their connections to the Apostles.

More than that, there is an apparent understanding within the writings themselves that they are new Scriptures on par with the Old Testament. For example, in **1 Corinthians 14:37-38** the Apostle Paul writes:

**37**If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. **38**But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

“What I am writing,” Paul says, “is the Lord’s command.” Paul believed his Apostolic calling gave him the authority to write on God’s behalf.

And then there’s **2 Peter 3:15-16**, which I have always thought were fun verses:

**15**Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. **16**He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

These verses are fun because Peter admits that he sometimes finds Paul’s letters hard to understand; which is encouraging to me whenever I’m struggling to make sense of the book of Romans. But this verse is important to us because Peter compares Paul’s writings to “the other Scriptures.” Clearly there is an understanding, even as the New Testament is being written, that these writings have the same status as the Old Testament books.

As **2 Timothy 3:16** says, “All Scripture (including New Testament Scripture) is God-breathed.”

***Wise for Salvation***Which brings us to our third point: **God has spoken in Scripture for our good.** The Bible is a gift from God to us. It is useful, for us. Let me put the rest of **verse 16 up into verse 17:**

**16**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17**so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There is a purpose for Scripture. The Bible is given to us to thoroughly equip us for every good work. The Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

In other words, the Bible has a lot to say about a lot of topics that can make us better people.

The Scriptures teach. They tell us who God is and what He demands; and they tell us who we are and what we need. It talks about love and marriage. It talks about work and money and what should be most important to us. It talks about what we owe to civil government as well as what it means to belong to the Kingdom of God.

Scripture also rebukes and corrects. It convicts us and consoles us. It stops us short when we are walking down a wrong path and challenges us to get on the right path.

Plus, it trains us for righteousness. No one makes it as a great musician without hours of practice; and no one makes it in holiness without hours and days and years of hearing and savoring God’s words.

But the most important thing the Bible does for us is not mentioned in verses 16 and 17, but **in verse 15:**

**15**and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

The most important way Scripture is useful to us is by making us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. It’s in the Bible that we here the old, old story of Jesus and His love. It’s in the Bible that we are called to put our faith and trust in Him and Him alone. It’s in the Bible that we discover God’s amazing grace at the cross and the new life of the empty tomb.

Remember, the fundamental question being answered by the *5 Solas* is: how can human sinners be made right with a Holy God? The most important question anybody can ask is: How can I be saved? And the answer, in the 5 Solas is: We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to scripture alone. Next week we’ll see that the purpose is to the glory of God alone.

But the point I’m making now is that we know the answer to the question because of Scripture. The Bible is where we are made wise for salvation. The Scriptures are the answer to how we are made right with God.

And it is scripture alone. Not that you can’t hear about Jesus from your mom and dad. Not that you can’t be led to salvation by a preacher or a youth pastor or a camp counselor. Not that you can’t pick up a tract in the lobby of the hotel that explains salvation and give your life to Jesus then and there. There are lots of ways that you can hear about Jesus and be led to faith: but if the salvation that is explained to you is not consistent with the good news proclaimed in scripture, then it is not salvation at all.

That was Luther’s point when he made his stand at the Diet of Worms. He could not and would not agree to the teachings of councils or popes that went beyond or were contradictory to the Word of God. It was clear to him that they were teaching things about humanity’s eternal relationship with God that were not supported by Scripture, and he would not accept it. His conscience would not allow it. He took his stand on Scripture alone.

***No Other Gospel***Let me end with this. In the book of Galatians, which we looked at in part a couple of weeks ago, Paul is taking on false teachers who are trying to add works of the law to the finished work of Christ. **He writes this:**

**6**I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— **7**which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. **8**But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! **9**As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse! (Gal. 1:6-9)

A different gospel, which is not gospel at all. Paul says that if anybody comes to you—whether it be Paul himself, or another apostle, or me, or some preacher on TV, or some council in a city like Worms or wherever—or even an angel coming down from what appears to be heaven!—if anybody comes to you and preaches any other gospel than the gospel that is contained for us in these Holy Scriptures—then do not listen!

Let them be cursed! Let God judge them!

For the only gospel, the only good news that is going to get any of us right with God, is the gospel breathed out by God in His Holy Scriptures for the purpose of making us wise unto salvation.