

“BY WHAT AUTHORITY? SCRIPTURE ALONE.”

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Scripture Texts: Mark 11:27-28; II Timothy 3:14-17

Prayer: Holy Father, as you by the power of your Holy Spirit caused your Word to be faithfully spoken and written, so now cause it by your Spirit to bear good fruit in our hearts. Through my preaching glorify yourself and your Holy Word and edify us all with life-changing truth.

Introduction.

Do you remember last week when I asked if you appreciated owning your own Bible and that it is in your own language?

Can you imagine not having a Bible and never hearing it in your own language? Can you imagine what the day would be like when you got your very own Bible in your language?

It happened to some people last month, and a friend of mine was there to witness it. Listen to what that day was like.

“On August 23, in a village in central Tanzania (which is in east Africa), around 600 people gathered to celebrate the dedication of the New Testament in the Burunge language! What a day— music, singing, dancing, preaching, and reading from the Word of God in the Burunge language! There was a moment during the celebrations when the importance of the occasion hit home with me. Several Burunge dressed in traditional clothing were leading a cultural dance and invited some of us to come out and dance with them. With arms around people I had never met before, jumping up and down as we moved around in a circle, tears came to my eyes as I experienced a piece of their joy in receiving the Word of God in their mother tongue. Praise the Lord for the power of his Word and that the Burunge now have the New Testament in their language!” (Johnny Walker).

Can you imagine not having the truth of the Word of God in your own language? Can you imagine what a famine of the Word of God would be like?

A Famine for the Word.

The prophet Amos describes such a day:

Amos 8:11 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

In the Reformation, there was a famine relative to the Scriptures.

First, the Church believed the Bible should only be in Latin and that only the priests should read and interpret the Scriptures for the people. The common person didn't have or know the Word.

Second, the Church believed that tradition and the Pope were in equal authority with the Scripture. They believed the Bible was a trustworthy authority, just not the final authority. They believed the Pope was infallible and the church infallibly interpreted and defined the Bible. Scripture submitted to church tradition and ecclesiastical authority.

The famine then was no Bibles in their language and the Bible was covered up by the traditions of man. That isn't our problem today, now we have a different kind of famine for the Word. Today we have lots of Bible and in many languages, but today the Bible is ignored, unread and not even believed.

In those days, there was a famine because the bread of the Word of life was hidden, covered up, hard to find.

Today there is a famine because the bread that is right in front of us is ignored or rejected. "I don't want that bread, I want some other kind of bread." Like the streams of living water that are passed by for stagnant and cracked cisterns.

Today I am my only authority. My experiences and my preferences are my guide. Everything is subjective and relative.

Ethical and moral issues are based on personal stories or the experience of those we know or our own feelings about a matter. Instead of my experiences leading me to Scripture to get the truth, my experiences are my truth, the lens through which I view Scripture. Scripture must submit to my will.

The Reformation was a movement of going forward by going backward. The Reformers were not coming up with something new, but simply to go back to the Bible.

We need a Reformation of our view of the Bible and a return to reverence, love, respect, acceptance and adherence to its final authority in our lives and in the church.

Why Scripture still matters? II Timothy 3:14-17.

Paul at the end of his life gives some wise counsel to his young disciple, Timothy. He says in chapter 3 of II Timothy, "Timothy, when you find yourself surrounded by:

II Timothy 3:2-5 "People [who are] lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 ... slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power"

Make sure you continue in what you have learn and have firmly believed. Timothy, in these days when people compromise and don't believe there is truth, you persevere, remain steadfast.”

Paul gives Timothy six good reasons to do this.

First, because you know those from whom you have heard the truth from childhood.

Besides taking for granted that we have the Scriptures in our own language, we also take for granted how long we have had them. Many of you have known a lifetime of devotions, time reading and hearing read the Word of God.

To know the Word from childhood is a precious gift. Thank those from whom you first heard the Word and thank God. Paul reminded Timothy of this earlier in his letter.

II Timothy 1:5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

You third graders who got your Bible this morning. I know your parents and many of your grandparents. They love God and they love the Bible and they love you.

Continue in what you have learned because of from whom you have learned it, parents and grandparents, your teachers and pastors, faithful friends.

Second, because these writings are different from all others, they are sacred, holy.

You would expect a book written by God to bear the marks of God and indeed it does. The Word of God reflects God's character and nature. It's divine, holy, unchangeable, true, trustworthy, honest, without error, it never fails us or misleads us.

John Calvin said on this text, “We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God.” To turn away from the Bible is to turn away from God.

There are countless billions of books written in our world, but the Bible is the only book in the entire world that is without error. The Bible isn't just true, it is truer than everything else we know or have heard.

Third, because the Bible is the power of God to make us wise for salvation. How powerful?

By His word God created all things. Everything that is in existence exists by the power of God's word. By His word God brings salvation. Christ is the Word of God incarnate.

Luther said about his work in the Reformation, “I simply taught God's Word, otherwise I did nothing. I did nothing, the Word did everything.”

What high praise for the Word, that it alone is able to make you wise. This wisdom is found nowhere else.

Scripture is the power of God by His Holy Spirit to turn darkness into light and foolishness into wisdom, and error to truth.

Do you want to be wise? Do you want to be smart? Trust and obey the wisest and smartest person and what He says. God's wisdom is the best wisdom about life, marriage, raising kids, working, money, economics, business, ethics, morality, the future, eternal life.

Fourth, because the Bible points us to and reveals to us Jesus Christ.

Since the Bible is mostly a book about salvation and since salvation is found in no one else but Christ, it is going to be a book about Him.

The entire OT foretells and foreshadows the coming of Christ; the entire NT tells of His life and work on earth and what He continues to do through His Holy Spirit.

Scripture opens our blind eyes and deaf ears to see and hear and know Christ. Without the Bible, we would have no knowledge of Christ.

Fifth, because the Bible from beginning to end is breathed out by God.

Would you like to hear God speak to you personally? Read His Word. This is the very Word of God given to you by God to reveal Jesus, translated into English by the labors of countless thousands of servants of God who love His Word and were willing if necessary to die so we would have this.

In our 117-year history, this congregation has had 16 pastors, many human voices but one divine voice. The human voices change, God's Word is unchanging.

The human voices must match God's voice as closely and faithfully as possible. It has never been my goal as a pastor to be original, but rather to be as faithful to the Word of God as He has spoken it.

Sixth, because the Bible is profitable.

If Scripture is holy and is the power of God for our salvation and reveals Jesus Christ and is breathed out of the very mouth of God then of course it is profitable, how could it not be? Is not God good and are not all His gifts good?

There is nothing you can read that is more profitable, more beneficial. It's the wisest book ever written by the wisest person ever to live. It's living water, it's a fresh flowing fountain.

Psalm 19: 7-11 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ...
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Is God's Word sweet and precious to you, do you love it, all of it? In God's Word, all of God is revealed, His tenderness and compassion, His grace and mercy, and His justice and wrath, His judgments and warnings. We must love it all and never make excuses for any of it. Don't hate the truth, love the truth for what it tells us about God and about ourselves. The humble and obedient find all God's Word to be more desired than gold and sweeter than honey.

All Scripture is God-breathed and therefore all Scripture is:

II Timothy 3:16b-17 profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Scripture is God's main tool for building into us maturity and wisdom, and for removing folly and error and sin. Through Scripture God molds and shapes our character as we submit to Him and His Word.

Scripture contains everything we need for salvation and for a good and joyful life, for living well. It gives peace and hope and confidence. It gives courage to face the future confident in knowing who God is, what He is like and what He is able to do.

The days are evil and hard. The news is distressing. It seems as if the world is going mad. Life is stressful. Our own sinful ways are discouraging. Progress in the faith seems slow. We feel weak or inexperienced or inarticulate in the face of pressures to conform. Some seem to be giving up or giving in to sin and compromise.

Listen again to Paul's wise, fatherly encouragement to young Timothy and to us.

II Timothy 3:14-15 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

What does sola Scriptura mean?

Does it mean that the Bible is God's only revelation? No, God has revealed Himself in creation and most supremely in Jesus Christ.

Does it mean there are to be no other authorities in our life, only the Bible? No, there are many important authorities in our lives, creeds, confessions, church tradition, spiritual authorities.

Does it mean that we are not to listen to past teachers and scholars and theologians? No, the Reformers quoted freely for the church fathers. We should consult the past and honor tradition and seek their wisdom. We stand on their shoulders.

We have to be careful with our words here. Sola Scriptura doesn't mean that the Bible is the only authority, only Scripture and nothing else, but rather that the Bible is our primary and ultimate authority. There are good lesser authorities, but when we line them all up, reason, experience, tradition, teachers and have to make a choice, there is only one final choice to be made.

Scripture is the final authority that rules over and governs all other authorities. We are to follow and obey all other authorities only to the extent that they submit to and follow Scripture.

The Reformation returned Scripture to its rightful place as the authority to which all other authorities bow. When the Reformers wrote creeds and confessions and catechism as standards and summaries of what Scripture teaches, it was always with the understanding that what man wrote must be tested by Scripture and changed when it didn't conform to Scripture, not the other way around.

Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone is our final authority. On this we stand firm.

Implications and application.

If First CRC is going to survive and thrive, it must be grounded in the bedrock of Scripture against the rising tide of culture and compromise.

If First CRC is going to survive and thrive, its pastors and elders and teachers must uphold the authority and sufficiency of Scripture as the unique, infallible, authoritative rule for faith and practice.

If First CRC is going to survive and thrive, her members must treasure and love and obey God's Word in all areas of our life, corporately and individually.

And just as it was true for Christ and the prophets and the apostles, we must be prepared to suffer for taking that stand.

We are a broken and needy people, we are struggling with the challenges of daily living. We need help. Press into God and the precious gift of His Holy Word to us. He knows what we need more than anyone else and He has given to us what we most need.

Our essential problem is a bread problem, a famine in our souls because we don't eat the bread of heaven, the manna come down from God.

God is a Father God. He speaks clearly to His children, He makes His will known, He warns and disciplines and speaks truth. Imagine a father who didn't speak, who was silent and distant and kept his children in the dark.

God who is the overflowing fountain of all good, seeing our need, and out of His deep love for us, condescended to our level and to our language to speak to us in a way we could understand.

This is one of the supreme manifestations of God's great love for His children. Out of God's Fatherly love and special care *for us and for our salvation* He has revealed secret things, "... which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."