

**SOLA SCRIPTURA**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
1. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY .....	4
Matthew .....	4
Acts .....	6
Romans .....	8
1 Peter .....	10
James .....	11
Jude .....	13
2. EXPOSITION OF CRITICAL PASSAGES.....	14
Mark 7:1-13 .....	14
2 Timothy 3:10-17 .....	16
2 Peter 1:16-21.....	18
3. NEW TESTAMENT GOVERNS CHURCH POLITY .....	21
SUMMARY .....	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	28

## INTRODUCTION

The issue at stake is the *sufficiency* of the Scriptures. Both Roman Catholics with their sacred tradition and Charismatics with their emphasis on continuing revelation via the Holy Spirit give lip-service to the Holy Scriptures. However, to these groups, the Scriptures are not the *sole authority* for Christian faith and life. This is a significant dividing line, one with profound theological ramifications. Consider the results of a 1980 Gallup poll which sought to determine Christian's opinions on religious authority. The question was, "If you, yourself, were testing your religious beliefs, which ONE of these four religious authorities would you turn to first?" The results are sobering, even more so when one acknowledges the statistics are 33 years old:<sup>1</sup>

Authority	%
Bible	40%
Holy Spirit	27%
The Church	11%
Other	22%

The sufficiency of the Scriptures has fallen upon hard times. This paper will examine what Scripture itself has to say on the matter. *First*, some brief statements from both orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics on the sufficiency of Scripture will be

---

<sup>1</sup> Mike Willis, "The Unread Bible," *Truth Magazine*, May 1, 1980, 291-292.  
<http://www.truthmagazine.com/the-unread-bible>.

provided to set the stage, so to speak. *Second*, a biblical theology of books by several New Testament writers will be presented and their particular views on the sufficiency of Scripture analyzed in context. *Third*, an exposition will be presented on several critical passages relating to the sufficiency of the Scriptures. *Fourth*, the distinctly Baptist (and biblical) position of the New Testament being the sole authority for church polity is presented. *Fifth*, conclusions will be drawn. It will be demonstrated that the Scriptures alone are the only infallible authority for Christian faith and life.

### **Brief Statements**

The objective principle of Protestantism maintains that the Bible, as the inspired record of revelation, is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.<sup>2</sup>

Scripture alone is the inerrant, infallible record of God's revelation to mankind. But Scripture is more than the record of God's revelation; it is itself the only infallible, inspired revelation from God that exists today. This is not to say that Scripture is equivalent to the sum total of all revelation that God has been pleased to disclose (Jn 20:30-31; 21:25). But it is to say that Scripture alone constitutes and conveys all that is necessary for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life.<sup>3</sup>

The Reformers did recognize a Christian tradition, but only a Christian tradition based on, and derived from, Scripture, and not one that equaled or even surpassed it in authority.<sup>4</sup>

Roman Catholic theologians recognize two well-springs of divine authority;

Scripture and Tradition.

---

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7 vols. (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 2011), 7:16.

<sup>3</sup> David T. King, *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith*, 3 vols. (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Truth, 2001), 1:43.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, combined ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 169.

Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal . . . Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.<sup>5</sup>

James Cardinal Gibbons, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic theologian, wrote:<sup>6</sup>

Now, the Scripture is the great depository of the Word of God. Therefore, the Church is the divinely appointed Custodian and Interpreter of the Bible. For, her office of infallible Guide were superfluous if each individual could interpret the Bible for himself.

The Catholic Church correctly teaches that our Lord and His Apostles included certain important duties of religion which are not recorded by the inspired writers (Jn 21:25) . . . We must conclude that the Scriptures alone cannot be a sufficient guide and rule of faith because they cannot, at any time, be within the reach of every inquirer; because they are not of themselves clear and intelligible even in matters of the highest importance, and because they do not contain all the truths necessary for salvation.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery, O.P., general editor (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1980), 754-755. Quoted in King, *Holy Scripture*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> James C. Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, ch. 2.  
<http://www.cathcorn.org/foof/8.html>

## **BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**

There is not sufficient space to devote to a Biblical Theology of the entire New Testament. Selected books will be covered which represent a broad spectrum of New Testament documents and authors.<sup>7</sup>

### **Matthew**

The genealogy implicitly recognizes the authority of the OT to prove Christ's deity (Mt 1:1-17). Matthew is also very careful to point out fulfilled prophecy.<sup>8</sup> The chief priests and the scribes whom Herod consulted appealed to the Scriptures (Mt 2:4-6). Herod later gave the Scriptures their due authority in his attempt to destroy the Christ child (Mt 2:16). John the Baptist also gave due weight to OT prophecy in his query about Jesus (Mt 11:2-3). John based his condemnation of Herod's marriage to his half-brother's wife on OT law (Mt 14:4b).

---

<sup>7</sup> For sake of space, Hebrews and the writings of John are not covered. Likewise, space did not allow for an examination of all four Gospels. Matthew therefore stands here as broadly representative of the four.

<sup>8</sup> Mt (1:22-23); (2:14-15, 17, 23); (3:3); (4:14-16); (8:17); (11:10, 13-14); (12:17-21); (13:14-15, 35); (15:7-9); (21:4-5); (27:9-10).

Christ quoted Scripture *alone* to refute Satan's devices during His temptation in the wilderness.<sup>9</sup> He did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). Jesus had implicit respect for the OT, quoted it frequently<sup>10</sup> and affirmed that *all* the OT will be accomplished (Mt 5:18; 13:17; 26:53-54, 56). Christ instructed a leper He healed to present himself to the priest in accordance with OT law (Mt 8:4). Christ upheld the OT divorce laws (Mt 19:1-12). He also instructed the rich young ruler to keep *all* the commandments (Mt 19:16-22).

Christ's ministry was interpreted by contemporaries within the context of the OT.<sup>11</sup> They knew of no other source of legitimate authority. Peter, for example, related that some people believed Christ was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another OT prophet (Mt 16:13-14). It is clear the people were searching the OT for the proper interpretative context about Jesus. The demons themselves certainly interpreted Christ in this fashion! (Mk 5:1-13).

During the Sermon on the Mount, Christ applied OT law to everyday life in the areas of anger (Mt 5:21-26), lust (Mt 5:27-30), divorce (Mt 5:31-32), uttering oaths (Mt 5:33-37), retaliation (38-42), love for your enemies (Mt 5:43-48) and social justice (Mt 7:12). Christ appealed to the OT to rebuke the Pharisees' erroneous views of the Sabbath (Mt 12:3-8) and to Jonah to illustrate the three days between His death and resurrection (Mt 12:40).

---

<sup>9</sup> Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13.

<sup>10</sup> Mt (21:13, 16, 42); (22:32, 37-39, 43-47); (24:15, 37-39).

<sup>11</sup> Mt (16:13-14); (17:4, 10); (21:9-11); (22:34-40); (the reaction of the Sanhedrin - Mt 26:63-66).

Though not in the Gospel of Matthew, the clear teaching of Christ on the road to Emmaus cannot be neglected. Two dejected disciples were traveling home, their hope in Christ lost. Jesus, in a disguised state, asks what troubles them. The disciples, astonished, relate the details of Christ's ministry. They admit they are perplexed and confused by the empty tomb, and lament they "*had* hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21a). Christ's response underscores the authority, validity and sufficiency of the Scriptures.

And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Lk 24:25-27).

Christ proved Himself *from the Scriptures*. There is nothing done by Christ which contradicts prophesy which had come beforehand. He emphasizes this point to His disciples shortly thereafter; "these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled," (Lk 24:44).

### **Acts**

Luke also appealed to fulfilled prophesy,<sup>12</sup> most significantly the fact of Christ's crucifixion (Acts 3:18) as part of God's larger plan for restoration of His creation (Acts 3:21).

---

<sup>12</sup> Acts (1:16, 20); (2:16-21, 25-28, 34-35); (3:17-26); (4:25-26); (7:42-43, 49-50); (13:33-35, 41, 47); (15:16-17 – this author believes James was merely arguing that Amos' prophesy *agrees* with what was happening. He was not arguing Amos' prophesy was being fulfilled); (28:26-27).



It is significant that Christ's apostles looked to the OT Scripture as the interpretative key for present-day events (Acts 2:30-31; 7:1-51). They continued to rely on the OT as they experienced miraculous visions (Acts 10:9-16), deliverance from prison (Acts 12:6-19) and preached to Jews that Christ was the promised Messiah (Acts 13:13-52).

Peter tied Christ definitively to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, calling Jesus God's "servant" (Acts 3:13), the "Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14) and the "Author of life" (Acts 3:15). He based his initial objection to eating unclean foods on Jewish dietary laws from the OT (Acts 10:14).

The Jerusalem Council was called due to disagreement over whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised (Acts 15:1-2). This is an explicit statement about the authority the Hebrew Scriptures had to the early Christians.

Paul's "reasoned" with Jews from the Scriptures in Thessalonica (and in Athens – 17:17), "explaining and proving" Christ from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2-3). Paul did not base his theology only on the new revelation he received from Christ (Gal 1:12); he argued that Christ fulfilled the OT prophesies *from the Scriptures*. This is very clear in Paul's sermon on Mar's Hill, a masterful exposition and synthesis of doctrine (Acts 17:22-34)

Devout Jews in Berea examined "the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so," (Acts 17:11) as Paul preached Christ in the community. Paul expressed regret for unknowingly speaking harshly to the high priest in Jerusalem (Acts 23:4-5) in violation of OT law. Stephen's opponents used the benchmark of the OT to condemn Stephen to be stoned for blasphemy – "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses

and God,” (Acts 6:11). They did likewise to Paul (Acts 18:13), “this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.”<sup>13</sup>

In Caesarea, Tertullus accused of Paul of profaning the temple by His doctrine at a hearing before Felix (Acts 24:5-7). In his own defense, Paul firmly anchored his doctrine on the OT Scriptures (Acts 24:14-15).<sup>14</sup> The Ethiopian eunuch was convicted in his heart by a reading of Isa 53:7 (Acts 8:26-40).

Apollos’ credential to preach the Gospel was that he was “competent in the Scriptures,” (Acts 18:24b). After the way of God had been explained more accurately to him (Acts 18:26), Luke spoke glowingly of how Apollos “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing *by the Scriptures* that the Christ was Jesus,” (Acts 18:28).

### **Romans**

Paul grounded the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the authority of the OT Scriptures. He tied the Gospel to that which God “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,” (Rom 1:2). The Book of Romans is literally *saturated* with references to OT Scriptures to make theological points,<sup>15</sup> far more so than a brief biblical theology here can hope to demonstrate. Once again, Paul does not base his arguments on philosophy or tradition – he bases them on Scripture.

---

<sup>13</sup> See also Acts 21:20-22, 27-30.

<sup>14</sup> See also Paul’s defense of himself before Agrippa (Acts 26:4-8, 22-23) and among fellow Jews at Rome (Acts 28:17-24).

<sup>15</sup> Rom (3:4, 10-18); (4:7-8, 17); (8:36); (9:25-29, 33); (10:5, 18-21); (11:8-10); (12:19); (13:8-9); (14:11); (15:3, 9-12); (16:21).

It is not the hearers of the law who are justified, but the doers (Rom 2:12-29). None are righteous (Rom 3:9-18); “there is no fear of God before their eyes,” (Rom 3:18). Knowledge of the OT law brings about conviction and knowledge of sin (Rom 3:19-20; 4:15; 7:7-25). The Law and Prophets bore witness to Christ (Rom 3:21-22). Abraham was justified by faith (Rom 4). We are dead in Adam but alive in Christ (Rom 5:12-21). God’s sovereignty in election is grounded in His corporate election of Israel and the individual, single election of individuals (Rom 9).

Israel refuses to respond to the present provision of salvation through Jesus Christ (Rom 10), and Paul bolstered his argument by citing examples of Israel’s previous rebellion (Rom 10:18-21). Gentiles have been grafted into the promises given to Abraham (Rom 11), “so as to make Israel jealous,” (Rom 11:11). Her rejection is not final and her restoration is assured. Paul’s appeal for Christians to present themselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1) is rooted in the OT concept of a sacrifice to God. Christ came to the Jews in the form of a servant “in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,” (Rom 15:8-9).

Paul presents the new doctrine he received from Christ (Gal 1:12) as explicitly *progressive revelation*. This gospel and preaching of Jesus Christ, in complete accord with all which has come before it, is a “revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God,” (Rom 16:25-26).

## 1 Peter

Peter writes his epistle to Jewish Christians (1 Pet 1:1 - “elect exiles of the Dispersion”), demonstrating a clear connection in his mind between the OT and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He stated that Christ fulfilled the OT prophecies.<sup>16</sup>

The prophets prophesized about the grace of God in salvation in Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:10). These OT prophets sought to discern *when* the prophesy of Christ’s sufferings and subsequent glories would come to pass (1 Pet 1:11). It was revealed to these great men, presumably through the Spirit, that these prophecies were intended for a *future* time. Peter identified that time period as “now,” or the dispensation of grace in the church age.<sup>17</sup> The OT prophecies take on clearer, concrete and unmistakable meaning in light of the progressive revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:12).

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look (1 Pet 1:12).

The context of 1 Pet 1 is that his readers could rejoice in their sufferings even though they could not see exactly how or when their present trials would end. Just as the OT prophets had limited understanding of their own prophecies, they trusted God to sovereignty work out all things according to good (Rom 8:28). In the midst of suffering (1 Pet 1:6), it is very significant that Peter points his readers to *Scriptures* as the source of assurance. Several conclusions can be drawn:

1. God has spoken propositionally to His people in a concrete fashion.
- 

<sup>16</sup> 1 Peter (1:10-12); (2:6-8).

<sup>17</sup> See also 1 Pet 1:20 – “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.”

2. Peter points to *the Scriptures* as the sole source of God's revelation to men. He bases his subsequent call to be holy in a decidedly unholy world (1 Pet 1:13 – “therefore”) on the assurance of salvation and glorification in Christ, which was prophesied of in the OT and disclosed more completely by Peter and the other apostles.

Peter quotes the OT to make theological points, underscoring the authority of the OT.<sup>18</sup> He quoted from Isaiah 40:6, 8 (1 Pet 1:24-25) and stated “the word of the Lord remains forever.” He concluded by noting “and this word is the good news that was preached to you,” (1 Pet 1:25b). Peter describes the role of the Christian in terms of Israel's covenant responsibility similar to Ex 19:5-6 (1 Pet 2:9).

### **James**

James also writes his epistle to Jewish Christians (Jas 1:1). His theology is steeped in the OT Scriptures. Without his unwavering reliance upon them as an infallible revelation from God, James could not have written his epistle. His theology of God's character is one of holiness (Jas 1:13), and perfectly in tune with the OT description of His character (Lev 11:45, 19:2; Ps 99:9).

Pure religion, or piety,<sup>19</sup> consists of proper conduct and character. James' example of proper religious conduct is to “visit orphans and widows in their afflictions,” (Jas 1:27), an admonition which is soaked in the context of the OT law regarding social justice (Ex 22:22; Deut 14:29). His exhortation to proper character is to “keep oneself unstained from the world,” (Jas 1:27), which likewise has its roots in the OT command

---

<sup>18</sup> 1 Peter (1:16, 24-25); (2:9); (3:5-6, 10-12); (4:18).

<sup>19</sup> William D. Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2006), 1170. Θρησκεία, or “religion,” may better be termed “piety.”

for Israelites to remain separate and uncontaminated by the pagans round about them (Lev 18:24-19:2).

James' overarching point is to contrast mere ritualistic observances with actual reverence for God; to illustrate what "religion that is pure and undefiled before God" (Jas 1:27) really is. It is merely a stepping stone from here to a contrast between mere outward circumcision and a true circumcision of the heart (Deut 10:12-16).

James quoted repeatedly from Scripture to condemn the sin of partiality (Jas 2:8, 11). James used the example of both Abraham and Rahab to make the point that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:14-26). He quoted Proverbs 3:34 to emphasize the need for humility and separation from worldliness (Jas 4:1-6). He pointed to the example of Job and exhorts his readers to have patience in the midst of suffering and trials (Jas 5:10-11). James cited the fervent prayers of Elijah as he exhorted his readers to pray diligently for one another (Jas 5:16-18).

### **Jude**

Like his brother James, Jude's theology simply would not exist without the OT Scriptures. Jude wrote of "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints," (v. 3). This faith Jude spoke of was the body of truth taught by the apostles.<sup>20</sup> This underscores the progressive nature of God's revelation, and is perfectly harmonious with Peter's (1 Pet 1:10-12), Paul's (Eph 3:1-13) and the writer to the Hebrew's (Heb 1:1) comments in their own epistles on this point.

---

<sup>20</sup> Edward C. Pentecost, "Jude," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 919.

Jude noted the presence of false teachers who “long ago were designated for this condemnation” (v. 4). This refers to previously written prophecies regarding the doom of apostates (e.g. Isa 8:19-22; Jer 5:13-14).<sup>21</sup>

Jude notes God’s righteous pattern of punishing those who apostatize from the true faith, such unbelieving Israelites, angels and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities (v. 5-7). These “serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire,” (v. 7). Jude then moves to his present day and condemns contemporary false teachers of these very sins! (v. 8). He mentions the archangel Michael, compares the false teacher’s way to that of Cain and Balaam, and compares their eventual end to that of Korah (v. 11). Jude also accurately puts Enoch as the “seventh from Adam,” (v. 14).<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Edwin Blum, *Jude*, vol. 12, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 389.

<sup>22</sup> See 1 Chr 1:1-3

## EXPOSITION OF CRITICAL PASSAGES

### Mark 7:1-13

Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem have come down to see Jesus once more (Mk 7:1; see also Mk 3:22-30). It is doubtful they were merely curious about Christ; they likely came specifically to investigate and condemn Him. “The scribes and Pharisees, who had come from Jerusalem, were doubtless sent as spies, to watch and to report in no friendly spirit the proceedings of the great Prophet of Nazareth.”<sup>23</sup>

They soon find something to take issue with; “they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed,” (Mk 7:2). The Pharisees had developed the custom of ritualistic washing before meals, along with many other inventions (Mk 7:3-4). Mark takes pains to mark these customs as the “tradition of the elders.” In their zeal to preserve their Jewishness in a distinctly un-Jewish world,<sup>24</sup> the

---

<sup>23</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, gen ed., *The Pulpit Commentary*, 23 vols. (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909). *St. Mark Vol. I*, 291. See also John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” vol. 2, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 132. Grassmick is more charitable and merely stated they came to “investigate” Jesus.

<sup>24</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 205. “Rituals concerning cleanness and uncleanness reflect rabbinic developments more than actual Torah prescriptions . . . As Judaism’s encounter with Gentile culture increased in the post-exilic period, however, the question of ritual cleanliness took on new significance as a way of maintaining Jewish purity over against Gentile culture.”



Pharisees had elevated ritualistic tradition to the same level as the OT law.<sup>25</sup> Edwards remarks that “by Jesus’ day, adherence to the unwritten oral tradition was as important for the Pharisees as was adherence to the Torah itself.”<sup>26</sup>

Here Christ issues His decree on the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Would He approve of the elevation of human tradition? The accusation from the Pharisees is not long in coming; “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” (Mk 7:5). Christ does not mince words; he calls them hypocrites and draws from a prophesy of Isaiah to accuse them of false worship!

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men,’ (Mk 7:6b-7).

Our Savior follows up this frank condemnation with a summary statement; “You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men,” (Mk 7:8). What follows is a sad and despicable example of how the custom of Corban had been twisted and turned into a prohibition from honoring one’s parents (Mk 7:9-13). Jesus’ concluding

---

<sup>25</sup> Grassmick, “Mark,” 132-133. “These interpretations, designed to regulate every aspect of Jewish life, were considered as binding as the written Law and were passed on to each generation by faithful Law teachers (scribes).”

<sup>26</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 208. See also Emil Shurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, 5 vols. (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 2012), 1:2.

“The predominance of Pharisaism is that which most distinctly characterized this period. The legalistic tendency inaugurated by Ezra had now assumed dimensions far beyond anything contemplated by its originator. No longer did it suffice to insist on obedience to the commandments of the Scripture Thora. These divine precepts were broken down into an innumerable series of minute and vexatious particulars, the observance of which was enforced as a sacred duty, and even made a condition of salvation. And this exaggeration even made a condition of salvation. And this exaggerated legalism had obtained such an absolute ascendancy over the minds of the people, that all other tendencies were put entirely in the background.”

remark on the matter is particularly damning; “thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do,” (Mk 7:13).

The word is God is made *void* by man-made traditions. Scripture is indeed sufficient, and Christ upheld them as the sole authority for faith and life. As David King observed, “if, in their day [Christ and the apostles], there existed alongside Scripture, a legitimate God-given, objective standard of authority such as extra-biblical revelation, it has failed to surface.”<sup>27</sup>

### **2 Timothy 3:10-17**

Paul wrote to his young disciple, Timothy, encouraging him to persevere in the midst of trials and hardships. Paul related that, though false teachers will come and persecute the brethren, “they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all,” (2 Tim 3:9). Paul reminds Timothy that he is very aware of how Paul has suffered for Christ’s sake during the course of his ministry (2 Tim 3:10-11). “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived,” (2 Tim 3:12-13).

Now, Paul turns to practical application for his apprentice. In the midst of this admittedly dark letter, after reminding Timothy of own trials and tribulations, Paul observes that anybody (including young Timothy) who seeks to live for God will face troubles. What practical advice will Paul give Timothy?

He tells Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it,” (2 Tim 3:14). Timothy was schooled in the

---

<sup>27</sup> King, *Holy Scripture*, 42.

Scriptures from his grandmother and mother (2 Tim 1:5). He was also instructed at length by Paul (2 Tim 1:13-14) in the Christian faith, which augmented his Jewish upbringing. Paul likewise also instructed Titus in the same manner (Tit 1:9). Therefore, when Paul reminds Timothy to “continue in what you have learned,” he was speaking of his childhood and young adult instruction in the faith.<sup>28</sup> This is a progressive revelation; a devout Jewish upbringing rounded out by instruction from Paul concerning new revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12; Eph 3:1-13).

Paul continues, and reminds Timothy that he has been acquainted with the “sacred writings” since childhood, which make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ (2 Tim 3:15). These “sacred writings” are the Hebrew Scriptures,<sup>29</sup> but the remark about these Scriptures leading to explicit faith in Christ demonstrate that Paul also had the gospel message in view here as a complete revelation.<sup>30</sup> Thus the complete, divine revelation of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are “sacred.” This accords very well with Paul’s command for those who preach another Gospel to be “accursed” (Gal 1:8-9). Scripture contains absolute, propositional truth which is sacred. Paul commends these Scriptures to Timothy as an anchor in turbulent times.

---

<sup>28</sup> William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce Metzger (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson, 2000), 562-563.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Timothy*, vol. 34, *The New American Commentary*, ed. David Dockery (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1992), 234.

<sup>30</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 563-564. “It seems doubtful that Paul would say that the OT by itself could instruct Timothy in a salvation that was by faith in Christ Jesus; this would be anachronistic. . . It may be concluded that the expression ‘sacred writings’ is drawn solely from the vocabulary describing the Hebrew Scripture, but since Paul is thinking about the *culmination of the scriptural hope realized through faith in Christ Jesus*, he chooses the anarthrous plural construction to develop his argument in the direction of *joining the Hebrew Scripture and the gospel*.” Emphasis mine.

The Holy Spirit guided Paul to choose his words very deliberately. “All Scripture is breathed out by God,” (2 Tim 3:16). The original Greek of *theopneustos* means “divinely inspired.”<sup>31</sup> This simple passage describes not only the nature of the inspiration of Scripture, but its source.<sup>32</sup>

The context of Paul’s statement (2 Tim 3:14-15) clearly include more than simply the OT Scriptures.<sup>33</sup> “Since the early church viewed the words of Jesus as fully authoritative, it would not have been a large step for Christians to accept the writings of His apostles as equally authoritative with the OT.”<sup>34</sup> Precisely because the Scriptures are divinely inspired, it is profitable to make the man of God complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). What more authority can Scripture ever claim, but that it was literally inspired by God Himself?

## **2 Peter 1:16-21**

In this passage, Peter shows great concern that Christians “confirm their calling and election,” (2 Pet 1:10). He listed several traits (2 Pet 1:5-7) which should be the practical outworking of a fruitful life in Christ (2 Pet 1:8). Peter endeavored to constantly remind Christians of these points (2 Pet 1:12-15), and then set out to demonstrate the validity of the truth he preached.

---

<sup>31</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. (Oak Harbor: WA, Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 566.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 567-568.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 568.

Peter made it very clear that he and the other apostles “did not follow cleverly devised myths” when they preached of the second coming of Christ, and reminded his readers he was an eyewitness of His majesty! (2 Pet 1:16). Once again, deviation from a concrete, propositional truth is a negative thing to the NT evangelists. Peter is stressing the legitimacy of the doctrine he preached, and he did so by affirming that it was truthful and in accordance with actual events. Peter recounted what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he saw the glorified Christ and heard the voice of God the Father issuing His seal of approval on His Son’s ministry. His Second Coming *will* happen. Peter assures his audience he knows this to be true because he witnessed God’s approval on His Son (2 Pet 1:18).

Implicitly, then, the whole of the Gospel message is also true and correct. Peter makes this very connection when he remarks, “and we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed,” (2 Pet 1:19a). Peter’s eyewitness testimony confirms the validity, accuracy and above all the *sufficiency* of the OT Scriptures – the transfiguration confirms the eventual fulfillment of the prophecies.<sup>35</sup> Peter uses the authority of the OT Scriptures alone to confirm the new mystery of the church age and the Gospel of Christ. This is progressive revelation once again; the new revelation in perfect accord with the old.

Meanwhile, as Christians wait for that blessed day (Titus 2:13), Peter calls his readers back to the sacred Scriptures, encompassing both the Hebrew Scriptures and the new revelation of the apostles. He tells them to “pay attention” to them, “as to a lamp

---

<sup>35</sup> Edwin A. Blum, *2 Peter*, vol. 12, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 274.

shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts,” (2 Pet 1:19b). “As a light, God’s word has validity and authority.”<sup>36</sup>

It is significant that Peter directs his readers *only* to God’s unshakable word for comfort and guidance in Christian life. Calvin remarked,

His object only was to teach us that the whole course of our life ought to be guided by God’s word; for otherwise we must be involved on every side in the darkness of ignorance; and the Lord does not shine on us, except when we take his word as our light.<sup>37</sup>

Peter continued onward and emphasized the source of Scripture; “no prophesy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation,” (2 Pet 1:20). Again, it is not a cunningly devised fable. It is divinely inspired. It is propositional truth. No true prophesy “was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit,” (2 Pet 1:21). “To bear” or “to guide” translates the Greek word *phero*.<sup>38</sup> As Scripture authors penned their works, they were impelled, borne along and guided by the Spirit. “The metaphor here is of Prophets raising their sails, the Holy Spirit filling them and carrying their craft along in the direction He wished.”<sup>39</sup> This, along with 2 Tim 3:16-17, is clear testimony to the divine nature, authority and absolute sufficiency of the Scriptures.

---

<sup>36</sup> Roger M. Raymer, *2 Peter*, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J.F. Walvoord and R. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 868.

<sup>37</sup> John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 388.

<sup>38</sup> *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Logos Bible Software, 2011.

<sup>39</sup> King, *Holy Scripture*, 95.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR CHURCH POLITY

The New Testament is the *progressive fulfillment* of the Old. It introduced an entirely new arrangement for God's rule over the earth, and corresponding new responsibilities for man.<sup>40</sup> If God has introduced a new arrangement and revelation for mankind, as He has done in the past (Heb 1:1), then it is clear man's authority for proper worship during this period is that new revelation.

Man's responsibility in any dispensation is to *worship* God in the way He commands by (1) an authentic, heartfelt response which takes (2) the appropriate form. The genuine response of the believer has always been an unchanging requirement. Rolland McCune observed; "faith in God's revelation was required not only for redemption from sin but also for fulfilling one's dispensational obligations," (Gen 15:6).<sup>41</sup> The *form* of that response, however, has changed throughout human history as God periodically alters the method of His rule and gives new revelation. That form of response changed with the ministry of Christ; therefore the Baptist position is that the New Testament is the sole, infallible authority governing *church matters*.

---

<sup>40</sup> Renald Showers' definition of a "dispensation" is particularly appropriate here: "A dispensation is a particular way God administers His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history." Renald Showers, *There Really is a Difference!* (Bellmayr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1990), 30.

<sup>41</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Detroit: MI, DBTS, 2009), 1:125.

From this basic principle, every other Baptist distinctive flows.<sup>42</sup> It is precisely because the New Testament alone is the sole authority for church matters that Baptists have traditionally held to the following doctrines:

*Regenerated and immersed church membership.* The Old Testament knows nothing of regenerated membership, for Israelites were born into the covenant family, but “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,” (Rom 9:6b). Likewise, the concept of believer’s baptism after confession of sin in the manner of John (Mt 3:6) was foreign to OT.<sup>43</sup>

*Autonomy of the local church.* The church itself was a mystery to the OT, a new entity revealed by Christ (Gal 1:12; Eph 3:1-13). The very concept of an autonomous local assembly (“church”) worshipping Jesus Christ as Messiah is blasphemous in an OT context of corporate worship; hence the persecutions the early Christians suffered at the hands of the Jews as a “sect.”

---

<sup>42</sup> William B. Johnson, “The Gospel Developed,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2011), 168. Johnson, writing in 1846, clearly laid out the Baptist distinctive in his article:

“The denomination to which I have the honor to belong, holds the true fundamental principles of the gospel of Christ. These are, the sovereignty of God in the provision and application of the plan of salvation, the supreme authority of the scriptures, the right of each individual to judge for himself in his views of truth as taught in the scriptures, the independent, democratical, Christocratic form of church government, the profession of religion by conscious subjects only, and the other principles of scripture truth growing out of these or intimately connected with them.”

<sup>43</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1992), 56. “The Jews employed baptism in admitting Gentiles as proselytes, but the sting in John’s practice was that he applied it to Jews!”



*Priesthood of the believer.* Christ is our High Priest, who intercedes for us (Heb 9:24). We have direct access to God the Father through Christ our mediator (1 Tim 2:5) and advocate (1 Jn 2:1). This concept is not found in the OT; the office of the Levite priestly function was “symbolic for the present age,” (Heb 9:9).

*Soul liberty.* As a member of a local, autonomous church body, man is responsible and accountable to God alone for his faith and practice (Rom 14:5, 12). “When a Baptist shall rob one man of soul-liberty, by statute, penalty and sword, he will cease to be a Baptist for that reason.”<sup>44</sup>

*Immersion and the Lord’s Supper.* These two ordinances of the New Testament local church are utterly unknown to the Hebrew Scriptures.

*Separation.* The concept of being set-apart and separate for the Lord in accordance with divine revelation is not a new one (Lev 18:24-19:2). The New Testament, however, has new revelation and doctrine for this present age which was unknown to the prophets of old. Biblical separation is grounded on the foundation of the holiness of God (1 Pet 1:15-16).

Baptists have always held the Scriptures to be the sole authority for Christian faith and life. They have *implicitly* held the New Testament alone to be the source for church polity, although historically this has apparently not been a distinction worth making.

---

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Armitage, *Baptist Faith and Practice* (Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1890), 37.

John Smythe, who founded what is generally considered to be the first General Baptist church in history in 1609,<sup>45</sup> wrote merely that,

the Scriptures of the old Testament are commanded to the Church, as also the Scriptures of the new Testament . . . the Holy Scriptures are the fountayne of all truth . . . they are the ground and foundation of our faith . . . by them all doctrynes & every Spiritt is to be judged.<sup>46</sup>

The 1689 London Baptist Confession observes, “the Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving Knowledge, Faith and Obedience.”<sup>47</sup>

The 1833 New Hampshire Baptist Confession speaks of only the “Holy Scriptures” as a whole.<sup>48</sup> The 1834 Confession of Free-Will Baptists speaks of both the Old and New Testaments, and asserts, “they are a sufficient and infallible guide in religious faith and practice.”<sup>49</sup>

A number of 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptists made the explicit claim that the New Testament alone is the source for church government:

The fact that Baptist churches alone consistently adhere to the New Testament as an absolute and complete guide, in matters of practice as well as in matters of doctrine, is freely and heartily admitted by many of the ablest defenders of other systems.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Leon MacBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1990), 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>47</sup> CCEL.org. *The 1677/89 London Baptist Confession of Faith*.  
<http://www.ccel.org/creeds/bcf/bcf.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes, Volume III: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 742.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 749.

<sup>50</sup> Albert H. Newman, “Baptist Churches Apostolical,” *Baptist Doctrines*, ed. C.A. Jenkins (Watertown, WI: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1890), 236–237.

Baptists differ fundamentally from Pedobaptists in practically adhering to the New Testament as the sufficient, the exclusive, and the absolute rule of faith and practice. The soul of Baptist churches is submission and conformity to the New Testament.<sup>51</sup>

The reasons behind this explicit stand are unclear, but a covenantal hermeneutic appeared drive at least one 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist to this position. Francis Weyland wrote that he “believes the New Testament to be the standard by which the precepts and teachings of the former revelation are to be judged, and that, thus, it is our only rule of faith and practice.”<sup>52</sup>

More recently, Richard Weeks elevated the explicit use of the New Testament alone for church polity to a Baptist distinctive in his own writings.<sup>53</sup> Several fundamental Baptist contemporaries from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not make this hard and fast distinction and continued to speak generically of “the Scriptures” to govern church polity.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Pritchard, “The Difference Between a Baptist Church and All Other Churches,” *Baptist Doctrines*, ed. C.A. Jenkins (Watertown, WI: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1890), 309.

<sup>52</sup> Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1857), 92.

<sup>53</sup> David Saxon, “Maranatha is Baptist,” *Maranatha Baptist Theological Journal* MBTJ 01:1 (Spring 2011), 20-21.

<sup>54</sup> For example, see Monroe Parker, “Baptists and Evangelism,” *Central Bible Quarterly* CENQ 04:3 (Fall 1961), 43: “in all matters true Baptists point to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.” See also Warren Vanhetloo, “Convicted Conservative Baptist Beliefs,” *Central Bible Quarterly* CENQ 04:1 (Spring 1961), 25: He lists the Baptist distinctives and states Baptists believe “in the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.”

Weeks' formulation of the New Testament as the explicit, sole rule of faith and practice in church polity was correct and unusually precise, much more so than the numerous creeds and confessions which had come before. It accords perfectly well with Thomas Armitage's statement:

This fact is perfectly clear, namely: That the New Testament contains all that entered into the faith and practice of the Apostolic Churches. Whether it contains little or much, it covers all that they had, and all that we have, which has any claim on the Churches of Christ. It is the only revealed record of Christian truth.

<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1886), 117.

## SUMMARY

The question is whether the Scriptures are sufficient. Are they the sole, infallible authority for Christian faith and life, or is something more needed?

*First*, it has been shown the Scriptures themselves are very clear that neither Christ nor His apostles tolerated or sanctioned the use of tradition for religious faith and life.

*Second*, Matthew, Luke, Paul, Peter and Jude relied on Scripture alone for their theology. As Armitage stated, “Christ and his Apostles always appeal directly to the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and to their co-relative sentiments, facts and precedents, where they are applicable; and where they are not applicable, a new revelation was granted.”<sup>56</sup>

*Third*, an exposition of several critical Scripture passages demonstrate that (1) Christ condemned the use of tradition, even if derived from Scripture, (2) Scripture is divinely inspired by God and profitable to make the man of God complete, (3) Scripture is the very product of the Spirit of God.

*Fourth*, the New Testament alone is the only source of authority for church polity

*Fifth*, in summary, “it is clear that Jesus, his disciples, and the Jewish people in general presupposed Scripture to be not only the infallible record of God’s revelatory

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 116.

acts, but the authoritative, objective link between the prophetic nature of revelation and its fulfillment.”<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> King, “Holy Scripture,” 42.

## Bibliography

- Armitage, Thomas. *A History of the Baptists*. Watertown: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1886.
- Armitage, Thomas. *Baptist Faith and Practice*. Watertown: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1890.
- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Blum, Edwin A. 2 *Peter*. Vol. 12. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Blum, Edwin. *Jude*. Vol. 12, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981.
- Calvin, John and John Owen. *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*. Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010.
- CCEL.org. *The 1677/89 London Baptist Confession of Faith*.
- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002.
- Gibbons, James C. *The Faith of Our Fathers*. 1917.
- Johnson, William B. "The Gospel Developed." *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark Dever. Washington: Center for Church Reform, 2011.
- King, David T. *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith*. 3 vols. Battle Ground: Christian Truth, 2001.
- Lea, Thomas D. 1, 2 *Timothy*. Vol. 34. *The New American Commentary*, ed. David Dockery. Nashville: B&H, 1992.
- Logos Bible Software. *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Oak Harbor: Logos Bible Software, 2011.
- MacBeth, Leon. *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*. Nashville: Broadman, 1990.

- McCune, Rolland. *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*. 3 vols. Detroit: DBTS, 2009.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992.
- Mounce, William D. *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Mounce, William D. *Pastoral Epistles*. Vol. 46. *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce Metzger. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000.
- Newman, Albert H. "Baptist Churches Apostolical." *Baptist Doctrines*, ed. C.A. Jenkins. Watertown: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1890.
- Parker, Monroe. "Baptists and Evangelism." *Central Bible Quarterly* CENQ 04:3 (Fall 1961): 43-46.
- Pentecost, Edward C. "Jude." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, 917-924. Wheaton: Victor, 1983.
- Pritchard, Thomas. "The Difference Between a Baptist Church and All Other Churches." *Baptist Doctrines*, ed. C.A. Jenkins. Watertown: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1890.
- Raymer, Roger M. "2 Peter." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J.F. Walvoord and R. Zuck. Wheaton: Victor, 1983.
- Saxon, David. "Maranatha is Baptist." *Maranatha Baptist Theological Journal* MBTJ 01:1 (Spring 2011): 9-26.
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*. 7 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2011.
- Schaff, Philip. *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*. 3 vols. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882.
- Showers, Renald. *There Really is a Difference!* Bellmayr: Friends of Israel, 1990.
- Shurer, Emil. *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*. 5 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2012.
- Spence-Jones, H. D. M., gen ed. *The Pulpit Commentary*. 22 vols. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909. *St. Mark*, Vol. 1.
- Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.
- Vanhetloo, Warren. "Convicted Conservative Baptist Beliefs." *Central Bible Quarterly* CENQ 04:1 (Spring 1961): 25-28.



Wayland, Francis. *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*.  
Watertown: Roger Williams Heritage Archives, 1857.

Willis, Mike. "The Unread Bible." *Truth Magazine*, May 1, 1980, 291-292.