

SOLA: Sola Scriptura

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sola is our theme for this year's mid-week Advent services. Sola, as the bulletin explains, means only or alone. Some would claim that this was the cry of the Reformation, that salvation comes from Christ alone, through faith alone, as a gift of God's grace alone. This is revealed to us in Scripture alone.

You know what, all that is most certainly true. But I would say that this is not only the cry of the reformation, but should always be the proclamation of Christ's church.

Today, we will examine Sola Scriptura.

Dear friends, where do you learn of the Christian faith? It most certainly should be Sola Scriptura – from Scripture alone. Yet too often, that is not the case. Many are the people who have their Christian faith informed by the ideas of the world, their friends, and even by trying to blend religious ideas that come from other religions.

As it said in our epistle lesson, even in Christianity, there are evil men and imposters who proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Scripture is tossed under the bus to give people what they want to hear and believe.

And what is problem that seems to be in common with all? It is a particular focus upon something other than what Sola Scriptura focuses upon. That focus is predominantly works righteousness, that is, what must man do in order to keep God happy and/or earn salvation.

This thinking leads to either watering down Scripture, or even tossing it out altogether.

But this is not a new problem. In fact, this has been the leading cause of confusion throughout all history in regard to the true God. You heard Jesus address this problem in the Scripture lesson from the fifth chapter of John. Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life."

At the time of our text, Jesus is talking to a group that contains a good number of the leadership of the church of that day. These church leaders were teaching and acting as if the Scriptures, what we today consider the Old Testament, was nothing more than a guidebook to the life of the believer, "If you do these things you will live. If you do these other things, you will die eternally."

How many people today view the Scripture in much the same way? How many see it as a guidebook to Christian life. How many have heard the acronym for BIBLE as guidebook for life B.I.B.L.E. – Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth?

When we consider Sola Scriptura, it means that we do not try to learn about God from anyplace other than God's own Word. Scripture is how God has revealed Himself to us. It is what God has to say about Himself, and also about our relationship to Him.

Could you write a history about me after I am dead, and say that I was a slim woman who stood about five foot six, and of oriental lineage? That would be to lie. In the same way, Scripture is God's revelation of Himself, and we are not allowed to change what God said about Himself.

Yes, there are many who might claim, "But there are many interpretations of Scripture." That is absolutely true! There are many, but that does not make them right. Scripture is very clear, it does not need "interpretation," just read it and you will see that it is very plain and easy to understand.

Usually, when complaints arise, it is because that someone has a false understanding of what is at the heart and center of Scripture. What is at the center? God's grace to us in Christ Jesus and faith in Him – Sola gratia, Sola Christo, Sola fide.

Why does this happen? Because by nature, we are narcissistic! That means that by nature – and as we know from Scripture, that is a sinful nature – we want to be the masters of our own destiny. And that is the predominant reason why many people do not like what the Bible– all these people see are the do's and don'ts. And when they do see Christ, they do not like Christ crucified.

Indeed, God's Law is proclaimed in the Scripture. We are told what we are to do and what not to do in the Scripture, this is true. We are also told in the Scripture about heaven and hell, and that some, by their works, will earn eternal torment in hell.

But if that is all that we see as the purpose of Scripture, then we have a problem. And the problem is, that is not what the Scriptures are. We have Jesus own comments to guide us, He proclaims, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life."

People are afraid of God because they do not understand Sola Scriptura. Scripture always has been, and always will be, all about Jesus, God's Christ. The Old Testament revolves around the One who is promised to come, the One who will defeat Satan, the Holy One of God who will suffer and die to redeem God's people.

In the garden of Eden, it was promised that the Christ would defeat Satan. When Abraham took Isaac up to be sacrificed, it was about Jesus. The whole Passover was about the blood Lamb of God on the doorposts and lintels, so that death would pass over, and God's people could enter the promised land. When we read the Psalms, when we study the prophets, it is plainly evident that they were pointing forward to God's Christ. So, throughout Scripture, it is all about Jesus Christ. We could even say that Sola Scriptura is indeed Sola Christus.

In the Epistle lesson from Paul's second letter to Timothy, we can make the connection even further, for Paul writes to Timothy, *from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.* Did you hear it? Paul proclaims it very clearly, Timothy, you will be saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, revealed in Scripture alone.

Jesus' own disciples sometimes wavered in faith. And in order that you would have your faith strengthened, Jesus speaks very boldly. John records His words and connects it to the place of Scripture in the life of believers.

It was the 2nd Sunday after His resurrection that Jesus again appears to the disciples locked away in the upper room. You remember that Thomas was not going to believe that Jesus had risen unless he was able to touch the holes in His hands and His side. All of a sudden, Jesus is there in the midst of them. He said to Thomas, *Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.* Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. Sola Scriptura delivers Sola Christo, in order that you might have Sola Fide.

Dear friends, as we approach the annual celebration of the birth of our Savior, we come again to Scripture so that it might declare to us that saving story. It is Scripture which reveals to us the prophecies of Christ's first advent. It is Scripture which proclaims Christ's work of redemption – His holy life, His innocent suffering and death, and His glorious resurrection. It is Scripture which points us to look forward to Christ's second advent, when He will return to gather you and all who have faith in Him, all who are His saints, into His eternal kingdom.

Dear friends, it is always Sola Scriptura, for it is all about Jesus. And it is all about Jesus so that you might have hope and comfort in these last days, for that hope and comfort comes to you in Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, and you do have life in His name. Amen.