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PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH

Sola Scriptura

the sufficiency of scripture



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SERMON SCHEDULE

April 7
Jesus, the Resurrection & the Life
John 11:1–37

April 14
Jesus, the Criminal
John 11:38–57

April 21
A Bold Word
Acts 7:1–53
Brad Thayer, Associate Pastor

April 28
A Brave Death
Acts 7:54–60
Brad Thayer, Associate Pastor

FIGHTER VERSE

- ¹ Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalms 1:1–2

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Perspective by email.

Elder Nomination: Doug Young



For a number of months, the Elders have prayed and discussed which men in the congregation are qualified and well-suited to serve Mount Vernon as an Elder. After much prayer and conversation, they nominated Doug Young to the congregation for the office of Elder at the Church in Conference on Sunday, March 24, 2013. With Doug's nomination as Elder and as a staff member, he would also become the Associate Pastor of Family Ministry.

Doug was born into a military family and moved a great deal throughout his childhood including places like Alaska, Hawaii, New York, Kansas, and Belgium. His family attended a variety of churches, and though there was no real Christian witness at home, Doug had an early awareness that the Bible was a holy book and that he wanted to go to heaven. It was not until after graduating from college that he came to understand the gospel and the good news that Christ was the only way to the Father. After years of striving for peace with God, the Lord graciously revealed, through his Word, that Christ had completely paid the full penalty for his sins and that Christ alone provided an unearned righteousness.

After a season of teaching and managing in the field of telecommunications and retail, Doug went to Southern Seminary to pursue the Lord's will in ministry. After an apprenticeship at Bethlehem Baptist Church

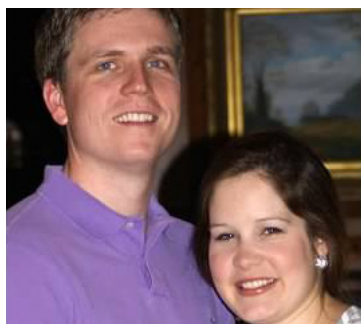
for Family and Children's Ministry in Minneapolis, Doug pursued a call to teach in Virginia at a classical Christian school. After 5 years teaching and 3 years in administration, Doug and his family came to Atlanta to take a principal position at a local classical Christian school. The Young family began to attend Mount Vernon in June of 2010, joined in January 2011, and has been actively involved in the life of the church. In July of 2011, Doug came on staff as Family Ministry Coordinator and has served faithfully in that role. Doug and Alicia are both very excited about the opportunity for him to serve in this capacity.

For a man to be elected as an Elder requires 75% of approval of all voting members at a Church in Conference. You will be asked to vote on Doug's nomination at the next Church in Conference on **Sunday, May 19, 2013**. As you take the next two months to consider this nomination, we encourage you to do the following things:

- Study 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-5 and prayerfully consider if Doug meets those biblical qualifications.
- Speak with Doug and the Elders about his desire and qualifications for serving. If you know of any reason why he's not qualified, please inform an Elder.



our newest
members



Preston* & Denby* Heard

Paul, Anne, Mellie

Dunwoody, GA

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

— John 13:35

These people (*) were voted into membership at the Church in Conference on March 24, 2013. Please get to know and love them and their families.



Ryan & Amy* Lambert

Joseph, Anna, Esther, Jesse, Naomi

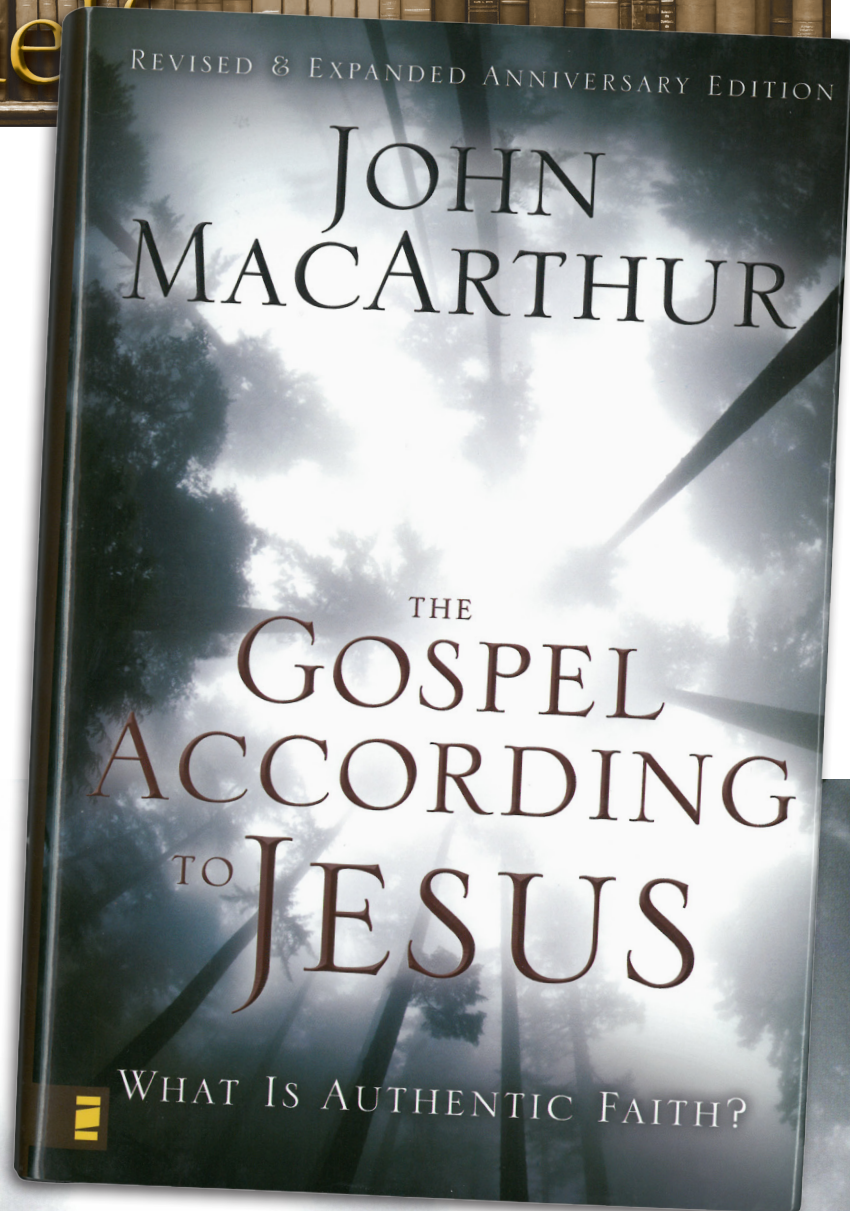
Sandy Springs, GA



The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?

by John MacArthur

Reviewed by Bill Coen



FOR TWO THOUSAND YEARS, CHRISTIANS have wrestled with what it means to follow Jesus. They have considered the costs associated with being his disciples, and countless men and women have endured prison, physical and emotional persecution, and even death for the sake of the gospel. It costs them something.

Colloquially, the word “gospel” carries a connotation of passionate devotion to something implicitly true. As I am writing, a documentary is airing on television called *Bluegrass Kingdom: The Gospel of Kentucky Basketball*. Whoever titled this program used “Gospel” because of the power behind the word to draw a correlation to the devotion of the Kentucky basketball faithful. But what does it really cost to follow the Wildcats in their never-ending quest for another national championship? If you are a fan of college hoops, you know how easy it is and what little real sacrifice there is in following a good basketball program. But when it comes to faith, how easy is it to follow Christ? Has it ever personally cost you anything? In his book *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Is Authentic Faith?*, John MacArthur asks: “What does Jesus mean when he says, ‘Follow me?’”

First published in 1988, *The Gospel According to Jesus* was written in the context of a popular debate among evangelicals on “lordship salvation.” This debate took up the question whether one can truly believe in Jesus without actually repenting? Those who answered in the affirmative were labeled as promoting another gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) called “easy-believism.” MacArthur examines this question and refutes this heresy in light of the “biblical accounts of Jesus’ major evangelistic encounters and His teaching on the way of salvation” (21).

Whether or not you are aware of this debate, more than likely you have sat under teaching within the last 30 years that has been shaped one way or another by it. In reading, I began to see how much of my life has been shaped by “easy-believism.” I have taken grace for granted. Much of my hope has rested in spiritual entitlement and empty platitudes rather than deep obedience to God by faith.

The Gospel According to Jesus is broken into six parts. In chapters 1–10, MacArthur asks, “What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, ‘Follow Me?’” and then shows how Jesus heralded his gospel throughout his ministry.

The “single, central, foundational, and distinguishing article of

Christianity” and the “first essential confession of faith every true Christian must make (Rom. 10:9)” is the truth that “Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3)” (25). In light of that, MacArthur is astonished that some teachers of the gospel can say that salvation is possible without submitting to Jesus’ lordship. He believes such claims are obviously wrong. He writes, “The belief that someone could be a true Christian while that person’s whole lifestyle, value system, speech and attitude are marked by a stubborn refusal to surrender to Christ as Lord is a notion that shouldn’t even need to be refuted” (25).

MacArthur also notes that, since Jesus never shied away from declaring His authority as “sovereign Master,” the true gospel according to Jesus is a message that cannot be divorced from the reality of his lordship. He paints a picture that, since we were bought with a price (1 Cor. 7:22–23), our submission to him must be with our entire life. We are more than servants; we belong to him. That is where we find true freedom. As MacArthur wrote: “If we want true liberty from sin and all its fruits, it is not autonomy that we need, but a different kind of bondage; complete surrender to the lordship of Christ” (34). Just as Paul wrote in Romans 6:16, “do you not know that you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

MacArthur continues: “The gospel Jesus proclaimed was a call to discipleship, a call to follow Him in submissive obedience, not just a plea to make a decision or pray a prayer....Our Lord’s words about eternal life were invariably accompanied by warnings to those who might be tempted to take salvation lightly. He taught that the cost of following him is high, that the way is narrow and few find it...present day evangelicalism, by and large, ignores those warnings” (37).

Unfortunately, much of evangelical culture takes a person’s salvation at his word even when his life testifies to the contrary. Whereas Jesus taught that submission to him is evidenced by the fruit of a transformed life. “Salvation is by grace through faith. That is the consistent and unambiguous teaching of scripture. But people with genuine faith do not refuse to acknowledge their sinfulness. They sense that they have offended the holiness of God. They do not reject the lordship of Christ,” writes MacArthur (99).

In other words, the evidence of salvation is in the spiritual fruits of a transformed life. As MacArthur notes, “Real salvation is not only justification. It cannot be isolated from regeneration, sanctification, and ultimately glorification. Salvation is the work of God through which we are conformed to the image of His Son” (39). Therefore, to accept Jesus as Savior and not as Lord is scripturally impossible. To reject Him as Lord would be to reject salvation and consequently reject Him as Savior.

MacArthur drives home his point further by showing how Jesus receives repenting sinners and refuses the self-righteous for eternal life. A repentant sinner by definition must be humble before Jesus as Lord in order for Jesus to be his Savior. Sadly, many evangelists today present salvation only as eternal life without confronting individuals with the reality of their sin and the need to turn from it. Yet, sin’s power over us and our bondage to it are the very reasons we need redemption in the first place. Salvation that does not direct an individual away from sin is empty and insufficient.

Jesus heralds this truth in several interactions during his ministry. First, Jesus called for a new birth. When Jesus met with Nicodemus, he did not offer an easy choice. In calling him to a spiritual rebirth, he demanded that Nicodemus forsake everything he stood for and believed in for the sake of Christ. Jesus called him to reject his “righteousness” and repent.

Second, Jesus demanded true worship. When Jesus called the woman at the well to himself, he “had to force her to face her indifference, lust, self-centeredness, immorality, and religious prejudice,” notes

MacArthur (63). Her conversion is not explicit in the text, but the fruit of her conversion was expressed in the fact that she told everyone. Her repentance is implied when she said that Jesus “told me all that I ever did” (Jn. 4:39).

Third, Jesus challenged an eager seeker. MacArthur writes, “Most people who witness for Christ regularly would admit that it is relatively easy to get people to profess faith. Getting them to follow the Lord is a much more frustrating experience” (89). This is seen when Jesus challenged the rich young ruler of Matthew 19. He was first told he had to keep the law. The young man claimed that he “had since his birth” (unrepentant). To prove his point, Jesus asked him to choose between his possessions and following Him. The young man’s question to Jesus was about eternal life and our Lord’s answer was that he—i.e., Jesus—will not be usurped by anything. “Salvation is only for those who are willing to give Christ first place in their lives” (90).

In part 3, MacArthur walks through six different parables to show how Jesus illustrated his gospel. Matthew 12 signaled a shift in his teaching style when he began to teach using parables. MacArthur observes how these teachings were received by his hearers: “Those who hungered to understand—the genuine believers—found Him eager to explain every detail.... Those who hated the truth, didn’t bother to ask” (127).

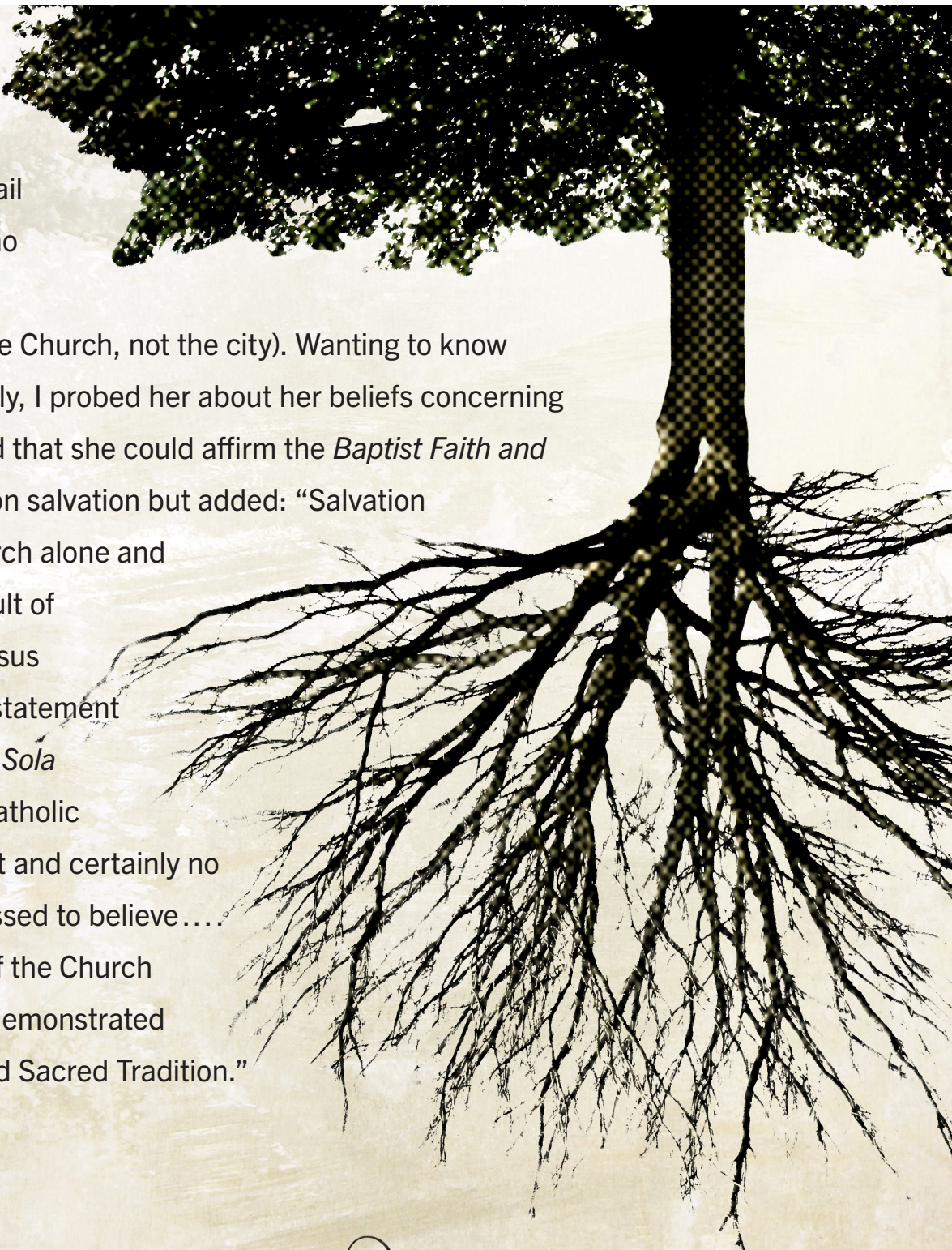
MacArthur examines the parables in detail to demonstrate the consistency of the gospel Jesus preached and the necessity of submission to his lordship. The parable of the wheat and tares, for example, was a clear call to obedience and submission. “*Christians are not supposed to live like unsaved people...some Christians today seem to take perverse pride in never challenging the lifestyle of anyone who claims to be a believer...The notion that faith is nothing more than believing a few biblical facts caters to human depravity. If repentance, holiness of life and submission to the lordship of Christ are all optional, why should we expect the redeemed to differ from the heathen?*” (137, emphasis added).

In part 4, “Jesus Explains His Gospel,” MacArthur weighs the popularized gospel of today against Jesus’ explanation of his gospel. For example, within many churches or denominations, there is either an absence or a distorted understanding of what it means and the necessity of repentance. Yet, Jesus repeated it over and over again. In Luke 5:31, he described his own objective as “to call sinners to repentance.” On another occasion, he said that if you don’t repent, you will perish.

The call to salvation is a call to discipleship. Since sin is the reason redemption is necessary, Jesus calls us to repent. Therefore, when repentance is ignored or downplayed, then an incomplete gospel is preached. Furthermore, if repentance is not a part of one’s life, he or she has no biblical warrant to call himself or herself a disciple.

Another example is the contemporary view of faith in contrast to the faith as described in Scripture. MacArthur states, “The typical idea of faith relegates it to a momentary act that takes place in the mind, a decision to believe the fact of the gospel—nothing more than a response to a divine initiative. Herein lies the fallacy of today’s popular approach to evangelism. The modern definition of faith eliminates repentance; it erases the moral significance of believing; it obviates the work of God in the sinner’s heart; it makes ongoing trust in the Lord optional. Far from championing the truth that human works have no place in salvation, modern easy-believism has made faith itself a wholly human work” (187).

So, in conclusion, what does it mean to say you’re a follower of Jesus? It means continual repentance cannot be overlooked. It means that conversion is just the beginning of the transformation of salvation. It means that we cannot accept Jesus as Savior and live however we want. It means that following Jesus costs us our self righteousness, our identity, and our sin. Thankfully, for the redeemed, Jesus has paid all of these costs. ■



Not long ago, I received an email from a young lady who had recently decided to return to Rome (the Church, not the city). Wanting to know where she is spiritually, I probed her about her beliefs concerning salvation. She replied that she could affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message* statement on salvation but added: “Salvation comes from the Church alone and is not merely the result of a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord,” this statement “has its foundation in *Sola Scriptura* which no Catholic could claim to accept and certainly no early Christian professed to believe.... There is a marriage of the Church and Jesus Christ as demonstrated through Scripture and Sacred Tradition.”

Sola Scriptura

the sufficiency of scripture

On April 8, 1546, the Roman Catholic Church decided at the Council of Trent that “unwritten traditions” passed on by the Church have as much authority as the Bible. It is these “unwritten traditions” that my friend called “Sacred Tradition.” What should I tell this young woman who denies that Scripture alone is sufficient to teach us all we need to know about Christian faith and life?

Another story. Not long after I arrived here in Atlanta, I received a phone call from a man who had recently separated from his wife. He made no accusations of infidelity against her, but he could not stand the thought of staying married to her. I will never forget how that conversation ended. “Pastor,” he said, “the Lord told me that I need to get out of this marriage. He said I should get a divorce.”

Both that young woman who returned to Rome and that man who divorced his wife share something in common. Each professes Christ while denying that the Bible alone is sufficient for Christian faith and salvation and practice. Both reject the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

One of the most important things that I do as a pastor is to lead my church to embrace the trustworthiness, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture. I need to understand this truth with my head, and I need to feel it in my bones. In other words, it needs to shape my very approach to the church and ministry. Our ministry will not be successful in the view of God unless our confidence is supremely in the Word of God. Therefore, I want to answer three questions: First, what is *sola scriptura*? Second, why do I believe in *sola scriptura*? And third, what does *sola scriptura* mean for my ministry today?

WHAT IS SOLA SCRIPTURA?

The Latin phrase, *sola scriptura*, means simply, “by the Scriptures alone.” It is the teaching that the infallible Bible is absolutely sufficient for Christian faith, salvation, and practice. It is a doctrine rediscovered during the Reformation. Martin Luther tells the story of the day he found a Bible:

When I was twenty years old I had not yet seen a Bible. I thought that there were no Gospels and Epistles except those which were written in the Sunday postils [homilies]. Finally, I found a Bible in the library and forthwith I took it with me into the monastery. I began to read, and to read it over again.

Luther did more than find the Bible; he studied it. And when he did, he rediscovered the gospel that comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And as he taught the Bible, he kept crashing into the practice of a Church whose doctrine and practice had been shaped by the culture and not by the Word of God. In 1515, when Luther was 32 years old, he penned a work that got him into a lot of hot water. He called it *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In it he argued that instead of attacking the reformers, the Church should realize that just as Israel had been taken captive by a hostile, foreign power, the Church in the Middle Ages had been taken captive by a hostile and false theology. Therefore, the church should take the log out of its own eye and realize that it had wrongly given divine authority to the opinions of men. Luther put it this way, speaking to the leaders of the Church of Rome:

You decry as heretics those who refuse to contravene such plain and powerful words of Scripture in order to acknowledge the mere dreams of your brains!...It is you Romans who are the heretics and godless schismatics, for you presume upon your figments alone against the clear Scriptures of God. Wash yourself of that, men!

Forced to choose between the decisions of church councils and the clear teaching of the Word of God, Luther chose the Bible, committing himself

to live *sola scriptura*. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*, is central to the Reformation, but so is the doctrine of Scripture alone, *sola scriptura*. The Reformation birthed several important statements of faith that explain the Bible’s teaching about itself. A statement of faith is simply a summary of Christian doctrine or teaching. Read these words from the *Westminster Confession* of 1646. This *Confession* is one of the earliest English Presbyterian confessions of faith:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

In 1677 the English Baptists sought to produce their own statement of faith. They also began with the doctrine of Scripture:

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient rule of all saving Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience; Although the light of Nature, and the works of Creation and Providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will, which is necessary unto salvation.

Sola scriptura is the teaching that the infallible Bible is absolutely sufficient for Christian faith, salvation, and practice. There is no other source of knowledge that can explain to us the Christian faith, no other source of knowledge that can lead us into a right relationship with God, no other source of knowledge that shows us how to walk with God.

This does not mean that the Bible is sufficient for *every* kind of work. A medical doctor needs more than the Bible to diagnose a patient. A carpenter needs more than the Bible to build a desk. A basketball player needs more than the Bible to become a professional. An accountant needs more than the Bible to hone his skill. But a man, woman, or child needs only the Bible to learn the faith, find the faith, and walk in the faith. The Bible alone is sufficient for all these tasks. That is the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.

The Bible teaches that *it* is absolutely sufficient for Christian faith, salvation, and practice.

WHY BELIEVE IN SOLA SCRIPTURA?

I’ll give three answers. First, because the Bible teaches *sola scriptura*. Second, because my Savior models *sola scriptura*. Third, because the Spirit convinces me of *sola scriptura*.

The Bible teaches *sola scriptura*

The Old Testament is clear that the ultimate author of the Bible is God, the Creator of the universe. Proverbs 30:5–6, “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and be found a liar.” Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” The people of Israel were taught not to separate God from his Word. To trust in God was to trust

in his Word. God delivered the Word to his people at Mt. Sinai, through Moses, and he spoke through the prophets to Israel for centuries. When the prophets spoke, God spoke.

The apostles had the same understanding of the Word of God. Where Scripture speaks, God speaks. This is how Paul taught Timothy to understand Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:12–17:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have believed, knowing from whom you learned it 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. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

When it comes to what the Christian faith is, how one is saved, and how one ought to walk in the way of the Lord—Paul tells us that God’s Word is all we need. And by Scripture, Paul was not limiting himself to what we now call the Old Testament. He understood his own teaching to be a revelation from God. Notice what he told the church in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when

A man, woman, or child needs only the Bible to learn the faith, find the faith, and walk in the faith.

you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

If God has spoken clearly in his Word, if these writings are *his* writings, if they are profitable for teaching, and reproving, and correcting, and training in righteousness—then it would be the height of arrogance and absurdity to look elsewhere for spiritual counsel—whether it is a Pope claiming to occupy the chair of Peter or your own fallen heart looking to justify your sin.

We could go other places in the New Testament like 1 Peter 1:23, 2 Peter 3:16, James 1:18, and elsewhere, but the point is the same: the Bible teaches that it is absolutely sufficient for Christian faith, salvation, and practice.

The Savior models *sola scriptura*

It may appear to be circular reasoning to put our faith in the Bible because the Bible claims to be the Word of God. That’s why I appreciate a book by John Wenham, a 20th century, British, New Testament scholar, called *Christ and the Bible*. Read carefully to what Wenham wrote: “Hitherto Christians who have been unaware about the status of the bible have been caught in a vicious circle: any satisfactory doctrine of the Bible must be based on the teaching of the Bible, but the teaching of the Bible is itself suspect. The way out of the dilemma is to recognize that *belief in the Bible comes from faith in Christ, and not vice versa.*”

Years ago, when I read those words, they immediately resonated with me. I became a Christian because I’d never met anyone like Jesus Christ. When I was confronted with his claims in the Gospels, I knew I had

to make a decision. As C.S. Lewis so famously put it: either Jesus is a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord! Jesus—his character and his work—is the foundation of my faith, the reason I believe. Not only that, but he is the model for my approach to Scripture.

In the wilderness, when Jesus was tempted by the devil, how did he wage war? With the Word of God. Satan urged our hungry Savior to prove his divinity by turning stones into bread. Jesus responded with humility, citing Deuteronomy 8:3, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 2:4). The next time you read the Gospels, notice how Jesus refers to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings as the authoritative Word of God. When he spoke, Jesus presented himself as an authoritative teacher. See Matthew 7:28–29. And Jesus even promised that he would send the Spirit so that the apostles would remember his teaching and record it accurately. John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

If Jesus modeled *sola scriptura* in his ministry, if he lived on every word that comes from the mouth of God, then how dare I go elsewhere for authoritative wisdom—be it the councils of the church or the unguarded impressions of my mind?

Because the Spirit convices me of *sola scriptura*

In 1 Corinthians 2:7–13, Paul taught that it is the Spirit of God who opens our eyes to the meaning of the Gospel and, specifically, the wisdom of the cross. Read 1 Corinthians 2:12, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” Without the Spirit of God at work in our heart we would not, in fact, we *could not* understand the Gospel.

Part of the Spirit’s work is opening our mind’s eye to the reality that Scripture is God’s full and final word. John Calvin made this point very clearly: “The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”

As I read the Scriptures, I am convinced, because of the Spirit of God within me, that this is the Word of God, and that it would be foolish to stake my life on any other authority. Jesus said in John 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” When I hear the Bible, and only when I hear the Bible, I know I hear the voice of my Savior, and I know that he is teaching me that here, in his Word, is the key to Christian faith and salvation and practice.

And so I believe the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, because the Bible teaches it, because my Savior models it, and because the Spirit convices me of it.

WHAT DOES *SOLA SCRIPTURA* MEAN TODAY?

I’m not exaggerating when I say that without a firm commitment to *sola scriptura*, I wouldn’t have a ministry today. It affects everything. I want to end by sharing as practically as I can, what *sola scriptura* means for my ministry today.

First, it drives me to the Word. Do you remember the feeling you used to get in September when school was about to start? The smell of pencils was in the air, you picked out a new lunchbox, you figured out who was in your class. You knew that another year meant another adventure. For me, Friday morning—when I begin my sermon prep—is like the first day of school. I know that my sovereign God has a message for his people in that text, and I’m eager to dive in. And it isn’t just sermon prep. The more I think about *sola scriptura* the more excited I am to study the Bible.

Second, it discourages me from looking for spiritual truth outside of Scripture. Whether it’s Islam’s Koran, Mormonism’s *The Pearl of Great*

Price, or Vincent's *Heaven is for Real*, I don't need additions to Scripture or confirmations of Scripture from sources outside the Bible. I value Christian books, I love to read, and I use commentaries. But these are simply tools to help me understand the Bible better.

Third, it keeps me from claiming God as my wingman. Remember the man who decided the Lord told him to get a divorce? That was a bad conclusion. God shouldn't get blamed for his decision to divorce his wife. We should be careful not to confuse our desires with God's will. When I speak, I try to be careful not to communicate in such a way that I lead people to believe that I have received a direct revelation from the Lord. I may think that Mount Vernon Baptist Church should minister in Zimbabwe. I may have prayed about it, sought counsel, and found interest. But I am careful not to go to the church and say, "The Lord laid it on my heart to start a ministry in Zimbabwe." I'm basically telling people, "If you disagree with me, you disagree with God, my wingman."

Fourth, it protects me from cultural legalism. In certain cultures, even in America, some actions are frowned upon, even if they are not condemned in the Bible. Take drinking for example. I don't drink. But not because I think it is a sin to drink. I don't. I have made a personal decision to avoid alcohol, but I think it would be unwise of me to present teetotalism as a command of the Lord. I attend three services virtually every week—and I love it. But I think it would be unwise to present attendance at three services as a command of the Lord. Every church may have its own customs, its own "oughts" that may be important. But *sola scriptura* protects us from turning an "ought" into a "must."

Fifth, it encourages me to preach expository sermons. I believe with Paul that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Therefore, it is a goal of my ministry here at Mount Vernon to preach through the whole Bible. God knows what Mount Vernon needs, he has put it all in his Word, and it is my job to present that Word as clearly as I can to God's people. This doesn't mean I never preach a topical sermon, it just means that my priority is patiently preaching *all* Scripture (2 Tim. 4:2).

We should be careful not to confuse our desires with God's will.

Sixth, it frees me from trying to impress people with my speaking. I am not the greatest speaker. My illustrations are often wanting. My humor is so dry some people miss it. But I don't get in the pulpit to impress people with me but with God's Word. Like John the Baptist, let me decrease that Christ might increase.

Seventh, it informs my approach to counseling. A few years ago, I met with a woman whose problems I was able to quickly identify (or so I thought). In the course of an hour, with the help of a whiteboard, I successfully identified the idols of her heart. I even graphed them for her! When it was done I was ready to see tears of repentance rolling down her cheeks. Instead I got a blank stare. A few months later, we met to read through the Gospel of Mark. Her life changed. What she needed, more than anything

else, was to marinate in Scripture. For the first time ever I felt like Martin Luther, "I did nothing, the Word did it all."

Eighth, it keeps me from having to chase after fads. I don't have to dress a certain way. I don't need to play a certain kind of music. My church doesn't need a gym (though we have one), a softball field (though we have one, too), a mixed martial arts club (we don't have this) or a beer brewing bible club (yes, they exist). I don't need to play Fanny Crosby for the seniors at 9:15 and Chris Tomlin for the singles at 11:00. *Sola scriptura* allows me to focus on the job of an Elder—the ministry of the Word and prayer—with full confidence that the church will be blessed.

Ninth, it emboldens me when things go poorly. Two years into ministry here at Mount Vernon, I sat in my office as someone told my teaching was too masculine (I'm still not quite sure what he meant by that). Another leader told me he wasn't able to worship here. Someone else said I was too professorial in the pulpit. I would be lying if I denied these criticisms didn't make me revisit whether I was suited for pastoral ministry. I sought counsel. I asked people whom I trust if my weaknesses were a stumbling block to the gospel ministry. The consensus was that I should keep preaching the Word as best as I could for the glory of God. And I can do that, because I'm convinced of *sola scriptura*. God's Word is sufficient to build his church.

Tenth, it humbles me when things go well. There are seasons when the church is growing, the budget is being met, and I see genuine spiritual growth in the lives of the people God has called me to shepherd. But it is not because I am God's gift to Sandy Springs. It's because God's Word is sufficient.

CONCLUSION

My former pastor, Mark Dever, tells the story of an evening when he was lecturing on the Puritans in Cambridge, England. He asked his audience if they had ever noticed a wrought-iron hook attached to the pulpit in some old churches. He explained that those hooks are from the early period of the English Reformation. The hook is for an hourglass, and the congregation who loved her pastor would give him a turn or two of the hourglass. Most pastors preached about a half-hour, but it was not unusual to go much longer. One woman in the audience was taken aback and asked how that left any time for worship. Mark answered, "Ma'am, do you understand that those people who gave those hourglasses as gifts to their pastors would have remembered the smell of burning flesh in their nostrils from people who had been burned alive so that the Word of God could be read and explained to them in their own language? Therefore, they really didn't care much if the pastor took two or three hours to explain the Word of God."

May we be a congregation full of sheep who want nothing more than to be fed the Word of God, that we might be equipped to make disciples of all nations. ■

~ Aaron Menikoff

* This article has been adapted from a lecture given at the Feed My Sheep conference on March 18, 2013. If you would like to hear the lecture, it can be found on the Mount Vernon website at www.mvbchurch.org under the title *The Sufficiency of Scripture and the Faithful Preacher*.



April 2013

1	2	3	4	5	6
7 10:30 am Lord's Supper 12:00 pm Church-Wide Picnic 4:00 pm Short-Term Missions Meeting	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15 Russia Mission Trip	16	17	18
19	20	21	22 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon	23	24
25	26 Elementary Camping Trip	27	28	29	30 7:30 pm Going Away Party for Ingrams (Roberts)

EVENTS

CHURCHWIDE

April 7 10:30 am Lord's Supper

We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationship with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

April 7 12:00 pm Church-Wide Picnic

(See ad below.)

April 30 7:30 pm Going Away Party for Ingrams (Roberts)

In a few months, Darrell and Terri Ingram will be leaving for England to work among Central Asians. There will be three going away parties for them, the first of which takes place at the home of Joel and Carolyn Roberts. See *The Courier* for more details.

MISSIONS

April 7 4:00 pm Short-Term Missions Meeting

Bryan Pillsbury will lead an in-depth informational meeting for all those interested in learning more about upcoming short-term mission trips to either the Ukraine or Dominican Republic.

ADULT

April 22 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon

Everyone 50 and older is invited to the monthly RW&A luncheon. Bring a covered dish.

CHILDREN

April 26 11:30 am Elementary Camping Trip

The elementary ministry will have another camping excursion where we will sing, play, hike, and learn together as we study God's word around the campfire. Families will provide their own tents and sleeping bags. If you don't have a tent, we can help make arrangements for you.

BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Melissa Jackson
- 2 Evelyn Norwood
- 3 Nell Baldwin
Jane E. Hall
Lauren Kail
- 5 Bob Earl
- 7 Rodney Barry
- 9 Vic Chester
Drew Clayton
- 12 David Carver
- 13 Rick Hutchins
- 14 Susan Lawrence
- 16 Pat Arnold
Teresa Reid Dean
- 17 Mike Pacetti
Jo Anne Tyson
- 18 Angi Bemiss

- 19 Dustin Butts
Luke Gurley
Cole Warren
- 20 Donna Anderson
Dennis Mosby
Madison Reid
- 21 Dan Nable
Tim Newlands
- 22 Katie Bediova
Jena Coen
Ruby Fussell
- 23 Lesley Wetherington
- 24 Pam Hutchins
- 25 Paige Pillsbury
- 27 Jane Payne
- 28 Stephanie Nash
- 29 Jake Anderson

CHURCH-WIDE PICNIC

On Sunday, April 7, immediately following the morning service, everyone is invited to a church-wide picnic on the grounds. Everyone is responsible for bringing their own lunch. Drinks will be provided. Members are encouraged to bring yard activities, and there will be pick-up games for anyone interested in participating. Please contact the church office at 404-255-3133 or info@mvbchurch.org if you are able to help with setup or cleanup.



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