

**Five Solas
Sola Scriptura 2
2 Timothy 3:14-17**

October 1, 2017. I love October. It is my favorite month of the year for multiple reasons, not the least of which is the State Fair in Raleigh. I can already taste the chicken pita that I love and the fried snickers. I feel certain that fried snickers will be in heaven! I love the cooler weather in October, maybe because I lived in the NC mountains, not too far from Grandfather Mountain and Beech Mountain for twenty years. There was nothing quite so beautiful as the leaves at their peak in the mountains, in October. Football, pumpkin muffins, fall decorations – I love it all!

Not only is it the first of October, but it is October 1, 2017. That means that October marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, which is considered to have begun on October 31, 1517, the day that a German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church, proposing a theological debate with some of the leaders of the Catholic Church. The question about indulgences was, at its core, about how a person can be saved. The Catholic Church did not take too kindly to Luther's complaints. The Pope was determined to silence him. Instead, Luther's dissent infected many in Germany and other European countries where other scholars, like Luther, were now able to read the Scriptures in the Greek NT instead of the Latin Vulgate, which served as the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church. Discrepancies between the two translations led some scholars to rethink key points of the Church doctrines, which, in turn, led to many breaking away from the Catholic Church and forming new churches. These churches became known as Protestant Churches within Germany, though Luther insisted that these churches be known as Christian or Evangelical Churches while French and Swiss Protestant Churches preferred to be known

as Reformed Churches. I said last week that the designation “Protestant” was associated with the idea of pro-tes-tant – as, in, protestors. That is certainly the common understanding of our day and while the term may have derived from a 1529 letter of protestation that the German princes wrote against the Catholic Church’s condemnation of Martin Luther’s teaching, the etymology of the word is nothing, if not complex.

Since this subject is complex, I would say go to the website to hear the recording of last week’s sermon – but technical problems kept it from recording. My notes for the message are on there, though, and you can gain a fuller sense of where we are heading over the next few months. In case you were not here last week, it will help you to know that we are in the second of ten weeks commemorating the Reformation in a series titled The Five Sola’s. What, you may ask, are solas and why are they important? If you are here all ten weeks of this series, you will hear some brief introductory remarks each week because we have new people visiting almost every week. I should have different ones of you do a creative introduction each week. I should, but I won’t, so please do not volunteer.

Why the solas? Simply put, the solas represent the closest thing there is to a statement of faith for Protestants that distinguishes our beliefs from Catholics. I know that some of you come from Catholic backgrounds and you are very glad to be out of the Catholic Church. Others of you are still a part of a Catholic Church back home and you are quite happy to remain a Catholic. This is not meant to offend, but to explain why there are Protestant Churches in the first place. There was a reason, after all, for the Reformation. What do we believe? That Scripture alone – not what the Pope says, not what our hearts say – but Scripture alone points to salvation in Christ alone as our only hope of salvation. We are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone – not good works on our part in any

measure – and, my salvation is to the glory of God alone, not to my wisdom or even my good fortune to believe.

Today our text is 2 Timothy 3:14-17, a clear testimony of the sufficiency, clarity, and authority of Scripture. There is much to cover today on this first Sunday morning when we will end our time at the Lord's Table. Would you please stand for the reading of Scripture? 2 Timothy 3:14-17. I will be reading from the ESV.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Last words are important. The words we have just read are the Apostle Paul's last recorded words. Paul was awaiting execution in a dungeon of a prison cell in Rome, a martyr for his belief that salvation is in Jesus and in no other. He was going to die for his belief in Jesus, which he had derived from Scripture. 2 Timothy is the last copy of a letter we have that Paul wrote. It was written somewhere between a few days prior to his execution up to a few months before he died. Paul's last words were important words and with them he chose to point Timothy to – God's word. Paul's life would soon end, but he would then be standing before his Savior! Since God's word is eternal, Paul wanted Timothy to understand that through it, God would sustain and equip him for anything that he may face. We need such a reminder in our day.

I want to challenge you to find a few minutes in these next few days to read through the book of 2 Timothy. As you read, be aware of all

the places that Paul points Timothy to Scripture, which included all the OT writings. Paul likely intended for Timothy to understand that the same level of authority was to be applied to the gospels that had been written to that point and many of the letters that apostles had written to churches around the Roman Empire. Paul repeatedly pointed Timothy to Scripture as the foundation for what Christians believe. He encouraged Timothy to root out false teachers and for Timothy to preach the word accurately and boldly.

In verses 14-15, Paul reminded Timothy of his association with Scripture since birth. At the very first of the letter, Paul pointed to the faith of Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and to the faith of his mother, Eunice. Their faith was based on the foundation of the promises of God in Scripture. In verse 15, Paul said, essentially, that all the promises of Scripture were pointing to Jesus all along. By faith, we are rightly related with him.

You can see the value of godly families passing down the truth of Scripture from one generation to another. That is why I make no apologies for encouraging young adults to marry sooner than the national average and to have children sooner than society thinks you ought to have them. So many OT themes are continued in the NT, only with a better understanding of God's promises, including the covenant relationship God has with his people. God's covenant relationship was with the nation of Israel before Jesus' death and resurrection, but, now, all who believe in Jesus are brought into the covenant family of God. God often works through families within a church. For those of you who desire to be married but God has said no to this point – Alison and I pray for you, often. For those of you who are called to be single, your life and ministry has every bit as much value as those who are called to marriage. If you are single, please do not withdraw from the large family life in the church, but, rather, immerse yourself in family. God has given you a treasured spot in the life of GCC.

Speaking of big family life, last week, five people under the age of 16 were baptized. Would it have been more meaningful if five adults ranging from ages 23 to 67 had been baptized? Before you begin to think, “Well, you assume that children will be baptized, but when an adult decides to follow Jesus, that is special,” think a little more about what you are saying. It is more typical for God to build his church from within than not and it is a great joy when children are baptized! I know you agree. I can sense the joy in this room on the Sundays we baptize, no matter what the age of those being baptized.

Parents, you can be assured that if your children are part of children’s ministry or youth ministry here at Grace, they are hearing the gospel and learning a great deal about the Bible, but your influence is key in their lives. Ultimately, they will have to make their own decision, so no guilt trip intended, but if you are nonchalant about the truth of Scripture, expect pretty much the same from your children. Children and students of all ages – it does not matter how good your parents are, or, are not. When you hear the gospel, God calls for you to believe it and to live a gospel-centered life. Parents, again – a warning to those of you who very much believe Scripture informs our lives at every turn. As your children grow up, live and in such a way that emphasizes the beauty of the gospel over the law. The proper understanding of law and gospel was a central tenant of the Reformation. Inadvertently teaching your children that they can live the law well enough to please God is a formula that may end with their rejection of Jesus.

Before we move on to verses 16-17, let me point out, again, the truth of verse 15 – all Scripture points to Jesus. It is not that the OT God is a God of wrath and the NT God is a God of love. The Trinity existed before God revealed himself fully to us in the NT. God was merciful in the OT and the NT speaks of God’s wrath against sin – a wrath that Jesus absorbed for sinners who will repent of their sins

and believe in him. Scripture teaches us to repent – not, do penance. Learning this difference was an epiphany for Martin Luther. The Bible is not a book about heroes that teaches morality as the main pursuit in life. In fact, whenever you seek to transform people morally rather than pointing them to the gospel, you are only seeking to manage morality, and that is problematic on several levels, not the least of which is that society’s idea of what is moral and immoral changes all the time. The OT and NT are not two different stories, but, rather, one story with two parts, two chapters. The story is about Jesus. How complete is the story? Verses 16-17:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

When Paul stated that all Scripture is God-breathed, he was not seeking to convince Timothy of the inspiration or inerrancy of Scripture. Timothy already believed that! While I understand the benefits of being able to give a defense for your confidence in Scripture that goes beyond simply saying “I believe,” it is faith that opens your eyes to the truth of Scripture, not the other way around. Remember, Paul was writing to Timothy, the teaching elder at Ephesus, and he was encouraging him by reminding him that God had given him everything he needed for life and godliness in Scripture. Paul didn’t give his young charge five ways to answer attacks on Scripture, but, rather, he simply affirmed the truth of Scripture and all the benefits for those who believe and study it. Paul told Timothy that Scripture is clear and it is sufficient for all of life. He was not referring to a single passage of Scripture, but, rather, to all Scripture.

All Scripture is God-breathed – or, Scripture has been breathed into by God. 2 Peter 1:20-21 makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is the one who superintended the process of sinful and fallible men writing

the perfect and infallible Word of God, which is why we say that Scripture and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. Therefore, all Scripture is useful for teaching and rebuking, both of which address doctrine, or what we believe. That is why false teachers and false teaching must be directly addressed. If all Scripture is God-breathed, and if Paul was referring, first, to the OT in this text, it is why the OT must be studied along with the NT – only, we are blessed to read the OT through gospel-filtered lenses.

If you do not know what you believe, you may well listen to powerful and persuasive voices who will be happy to tell you what God wants you to believe. Do not take your cues from culture, nor from churches that preach law rather than law and gospel. Find God’s truth in Scripture. God tells his children what he wants them to know and how they are to live in this kingdom life in which Jesus reigns in the hearts of those who follow him. God’s Kingdom is not yet fully realized in our world, but it will be – in his timing and according to his will. The Word tells us that.

Scripture is not only given for our knowledge and belief, but for our behavior. “All Scripture is profitable for – correction.” Correction comes from the Greek word for *straight*. Scripture keeps us on the right path. NT commands are more numerous than OT commands and some are far more exacting, but they are to be lived in the truth of the gospel. Time in the word increases our faith, and faith causes us to live in the truth of the gospel. “All Scripture is profitable for – training in righteousness.” Martin Luther was converted while reading Romans 1:17 when he realized that the righteousness of God is not a demand, but a donation – a gift. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes through hearing the word of Christ, or, the gospel. As we spend time in Scripture, the effect should be that we are more like Jesus. How? Be sure to go to home group this week.

Here is a question: should we expect those in the world to live according to biblical standards? For whom was Scripture given? It was given to the people of God, and while it is very clear that when believers share the gospel with unbelievers, the active and living Word of God brings faith to unbelievers as the Father draws sinners to the Son, who died for them, it is also clear that God has a different standard of life for those in the church. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul told the church to not associate with a man who was living in open and defiant immorality, but he cautioned believers not to disassociate from those in the world who sinned because then you would have to go out of the world. That is why addressing cultural issues with anything other than the gospel is problematic. It is moralistic, in fact, and whatever the world's view of morality is changes at the speed of the Internet.

What can we do about the ills of society? We are limited, whether you think we are or not. The Moral Majority in the 1980's said, "Hey, Mormons, we are with you on pro-life issues," but somewhere along the line they had to say, "Uh, the gospel will not allow us to go any further." The problem was, the world had already associated unwise social tactics with the gospel and that did significant damage to the church's witness. There is danger of doing the same in our day, whether you are protesting or boycotting. Honestly, I just don't see a strong case for either in Scripture. It is true that I don't necessarily see a case against it, and, hey – 1st amendment rights either way. Please do not, though, pretend that it is a biblical mandate when you call others to action, and ask yourself whether your Facebook post is more likely to cause someone to see the cross or more likely to obscure the cross from their view. Scripture is silent on protests and boycotts, but the practices are fraught with danger. You may want to do one or the other as an American, but do not associate American with Christian, because you are right back to the Law, and you will not accomplish your desired end the way God has designed for his kingdom. Time in the word helps to

clarify, in our minds, the difference between God's ways and our own ways.

How can we know God's ways? Spend thoughtful and prayerful time in 1 Peter. You will see. Believe God's word, which is fully sufficient to address life *in the church*. Live the gospel *in the church* and the world will take notice. You will find yourself very much in the center of things in the world in productive ways. This week, before you write, before you post, before you boldly state your opinion in a crowd, stop and pray for the life and love of Christ to flow through your words. That doesn't mean ask God to bless sinful ways, but it means for the Lord to stop you from saying or writing things you will one day regret. The gospel is gracious and forgiving, reflecting the Savior. It provides security for the believer and it is attractive to the world.

I have said it a lot in this past year and I will continue to say it – take your cues from Scripture, not from the culture, even when the culture claims to be taking its cues from Scripture. In a few moments, we are going to gather at the Lord's Table, where believers are united with Christ and with one another. Let your heart be saturated with the gospel, so beautifully encapsulated in Scripture. Before we come to the Table, David Calvert, fresh from a sabbatical, will take a few minutes to share about Martin Luther's contribution to the singing of hymns and then to lead us in A Mighty Fortress is our God.