

SOLA SCRIPTURA

by
Pastor Michael W. Harding

INTRODUCTION

“Never judge a book by its cover” is a warning against premature judgments. The truth of this proverb has never been reinforced more aptly than when one gazes at the cover of an English Bible printed in 1537 in Antwerp. The leather cover is discolored and torn, with nothing attractive about it. One is almost tempted to set it aside. But this would be a grave mistake because there is a fascinating history associated with it.

William Tyndale arrived in Antwerp sometime before 1530, after he had printed the first complete English New Testament in Worms, Germany in 1526. He came to Antwerp for three reasons: (1) the relative safety of the English Merchants’ House, (2) the numerous printing houses located in Antwerp, and (3) the access to ships taking cargo to England in which he could conceal copies of his Bibles. But in May 1535, Tyndale was arrested. While Tyndale was in prison, Miles Coverdale, one of Tyndale’s trusted helpers, completed Tyndale’s translation and printed it as the first complete English Bible. This Bible, known as the Coverdale Bible, had to be smuggled into England because the English clergy had banned vernacular translations of the Bible.

In 1537, an English clergyman named John Rogers, who had come to true faith in Christ through his contacts with Tyndale, undertook a revision of the Coverdale Bible. Rogers completed the revisions and published the revised edition under the name of Thomas Matthew. Copies of this Bible, known as Matthew’s Bible, were sent to Thomas Cramner, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Thomas Cromwell, Lord Chancellor, who favored the distribution of the English Bible. They showed a copy to King Henry VIII. When assured by his officials that it was an accurate translation, Henry replied with stirring words, “Then let it go forth to the people!”

Henry’s order reversed the 130–year ban against vernacular translations of the Scriptures. For the first time since Wycliffe, an individual could legally own a copy of the Scriptures in English. Tyndale’s prayer, uttered in 1536 while being burned at the stake, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes,” had been gloriously answered.

But how did this stained copy of Matthew’s Bible come to be known as the Martyr’s Bible? The discoloration was apparent on nearly every page. Adding to the drama was a note, written nearly 200 years ago, stating, “This book was owned by one of the early martyrs.” The note was an allusion to the persecution and martyrdoms carried out during the reign of Queen Mary between 1553 and 1558.

It was a common practice during those times to put a copy of the Scriptures in the hands of those who were executed for heresy. This was done to associate heresy with the ownership of the Bible. Frequently, those who would witness the executions would snatch these Bibles out of the hands of the martyrs. Consequently, the stain on this copy of Matthew’s Bible of 1537 was caused by the owner’s blood!

Of the first five translators of the English Bible, three of them—Tyndale, Rogers, and John Frith—sealed their testimony with their lives. More than 300 others, many whose names have not been preserved, were executed during the Marian persecution. Though we do not know the exact name of the owner of this particular copy of Matthew’s Bible, we can state with

conviction that in some sense every English Bible is a “Martyr’s Bible,” because every page witnesses to the blood of those who paid for its dissemination with their lives (Van Kampen Collection at *The Scriptorium Museum* in Orlando, Florida).

These men understood that no doctrine connected with the Christian faith is more important than the one that has to do with the basis of true religious knowledge. When all is said and done, the only true and dependable source for Christianity lies in the book Christians call the Bible.

THE BELIEVER’S CERTAINTY OF SCRIPTURE

The believer’s certainty regarding the truthfulness and authority of the Bible can only come by appealing to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture in conjunction with the internal witness of the Spirit. The Scriptures are *self-authenticating* in that they claim divine authority for themselves. Paul, for example, claimed that his words were taught by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:13). Scripture cannot appeal to some higher authority outside itself for authentication. God is the author of Scripture; there is no greater authority to which one may appeal. The Holy Spirit is not *revealing* anything to believers in this regard, only *illuminating* their minds to see the truth, which has already been revealed as to its certainty and significance. A systematic study of all sixty-six books of the Bible will lead genuine Christian believers to the conclusion that those books form an organic whole—the canon of Scripture.

The basic Christian presupposition is that the one living and true God has self-attestingly revealed Himself in the sixty-six books of the Bible. Why is it necessary for a true Christian to hold this presupposition? Because all discussion and argumentation by necessity come down to a primitive starting point, a truth that is accepted as self-evident, an authority for which no greater evidence can be given. Consequently, all facts must be tested and interpreted in light of that authority — the Bible.

Unregenerate man, on the other hand, assumes that his intellect is the final authority for truth. An unregenerate mind, however, cannot approach any subject neutrally. The Scriptures affirm that the “carnal mind is enmity (hostile) against God” (Rom. 8:7). Man in his fallen condition does not *welcome* the truth of God for the simple reason that the natural man does not possess the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14). Consequently, the unbeliever suppresses the certainty, importance, and personal implications of God’s truth upon his life by his unrighteousness in thought and deed (Rom 1:18). Unless the Holy Spirit illumines the mind of the individual he will never understand [or grasp] the true nature of the Word of God, which is self-evidencing, self-attesting, and self-authenticating. The true believer’s faith rests in the Spirit’s power to open his eyes, enlighten his mind, and convinces him of the Scriptures’ truthfulness and significance to his life (1 Cor 2:4–5; Eph 1:18; 1 John 2:20).

THE BELIEVER’S CERTAINTY OF THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION

The Content of 2 Timothy 3:16

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul establishes *the Scriptures’ own claim to divine authority and relevance to sound belief and behavior*. Paul warns Timothy not to be deceived by false teachers

and impostors, but instead to continue in what he has learned, having been fully “convinced” of Scripture’s truthfulness and authority (2 Tim 3:15).ⁱ

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, [thoroughly] furnished unto all good works (2 Tim 3:16–17).

The Meaning of “All Scripture”

“All Scripture” (πᾶσα γραφή) refers to the whole of Scripture. The context and language both indicate that the Scriptures *in their entirety* are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction, thereby equipping the man of God for every good work.

“Scripture” (γραφή) has several important connotations in the interpretation of 2 Timothy 3:16. Most importantly, *graphe* refers to “the sacred writings” of the Old Testament *and all future New Testament writings*. The New Testament writers use this term over fifty times “exclusively with a sacred meaning of Holy Scripture.”ⁱⁱ For instance, when Paul writes, “the Scripture says” (Rom 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2), he regards this expression as God speaking; and the present tense of the verb indicates the continual relevance of Scripture’s authority.ⁱⁱⁱ

The apostles considered the other NT authors of Scripture as equally authoritative as the words of Christ and the OT. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul initially quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” Paul continues by quoting the Lord’s words as recorded by Luke, “for the labourer is worthy of his hire” (1 Tim 5:18 cf. Luke 10:7). Both “Scriptures” are joined together with a simple conjunction in 1 Timothy 5:18 and are given *equal authority*. This example indicates that Luke’s Gospel was already available to Paul in written form and that it was regarded as sacred Scripture. Furthermore, the apostle Peter corroborates the inspiration of the NT when he mentions that false teachers purposely distorted Paul’s letters as they did “the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:15–16).^{iv}

Equally important, the term “Scripture” indicates that the “*writing*,” not the “*writer*,” was the object of inspiration. True, the sacred writers were the “organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will.”^v They spoke as they were “moved” (φερόμενοι—“being borne or carried along”) by the Holy Spirit (v. 21 cf. Acts 27:15, 17). *Pheromenoi* is a present passive participle indicating that the *original authors* of Scripture were miraculously and continuously acted upon by God as they wrote.

The Meaning of “Theopneustos”

The English word “inspiration” comes from the Latin *inspiro*, which means to breathe *in*. Paul, however, asserts that all Scripture is “breathed *out*” by God (θεόπνευστος). This unusual word occurs only once in the NT. It is a compound of “God” (θεος) and “breathe” (πνεω). The lexical definition of *pneo* means to “breathe out.”^{vi} Various Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias describe *theopneustos* as “spiration,” “spiring,” or “breath,” indicating a divine product of the creative-breath of God.^{vii} God “spirated” the Scriptures. He did not “*in-spire*” an *existing* text but rather “*ex-spired*” or “breathed-out” the text.

There are a number of ways in which we see our breath. Our glasses fog up when we breathe on them. On a cold day, our warm breath will condense in mid-air. Breathe on a cold pane of glass and it will immediately become cloudy with the condense moisture fogging the surface. In all these situations our breath takes form. What could not be seen now becomes visible. Likewise, the invisible Word of God systematically condensed on the scrolls of prophets and apostles, as God “ex-spired” His truth on the pages of Scripture. Scripture is a direct production of God’s immediate power, not something previously existing and then infused with the divine influence. Scripture is called *theopneustos* because it is the product of divine “spiration”—the creation of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, inspiration is the activity by which that portion intended by God of His special revelation^{viii} was put into written form by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who worked confluent through the thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divinely chosen men so that the product of their special labors in its entirety is the very Word of God, including both the ideas and the specific vocabulary—complete, infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.

The Necessary Implications of 2 Timothy 3:16

The Scriptures Are Free From All Error in the Autographs

Whatever God *immediately creates* must of necessity be without error factually, theologically, morally, historically, and scientifically. The infinite perfections of God’s very being demand inerrancy and infallibility. God will not lie (1 Sam 15:20), cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18), and did not lie when He “breathed out” or “ex-spired” the sixty-six books of the Bible. The Spirit of truth (1 John 5:6) authored the Scriptures through human instrumentality, protecting the writings of the original authors from all error. Christ said, “I have given unto *them* the words which thou gavest to me” (John 17:8). The perfect God by the necessary demands of His own being communicates without error. The miracle of inspiration guarantees an inerrant recording of that revelation. To suggest that God can breathe error strikes at the center of the Christian faith. People who deny the inerrancy of the autographs are implicitly denying the Gospel, because they are denying the truthfulness of the only means by which they can know the Gospel. They are sawing off the limb on which they sit.

Erasmus, the Roman Catholic editor and initial compiler of the textual base underlying the KJV, was sharply attacked for some of his comments in his *Annotationes*. Erasmus was *justly criticized* because of his heretical view of inspiration. During the time he assembled his Greek text to parallel his Latin translation, he believed that inspiration protected the biblical writers in matters of *faith only*, and not in matters of history, science, or factual accuracy. In Acts 10, for example, Erasmus states in his notes that the *original words of the apostle were in error*, reasoning that divine inspiration extended only to their thoughts, and not to their words: “It was not necessary to ascribe everything in the apostles to a miracle. They were men, they were ignorant of some things, and they erred in a few places” (Erika Rummel, “An Open Letter to Boorish Critics: Erasmus’ *Capita argumentorum contra morosos quosdam ac indoctos*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 [October 1988]: 454).

The Scriptures Are Providentially Preserved

When Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed,” he refers *directly* to what the biblical authors wrote, not to what someone copied or translated. The Scriptures recognize the vital distinction between what the original writer wrote and subsequent copies or translations made by others (Deut 17:18; Neh 8:8). Several Old Testament passages indicate that the human authors of the autographs were conscious that they themselves were writing God’s words: David said, “The Spirit of Jehovah [Yahweh] spake by *me*” (2 Sam 23:2); Isaiah said, “Seek ye out . . . *this* book of Jehovah [Yahweh], and read” (Isa 34:16); Jeremiah said, “[God’s] words . . . even all that is written in *this* book” (Jer 25:13). In similar fashion, Paul knew that the directly inspired text consisted of “The things *which I write* unto you . . . [they] are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37 cf. 2:13; Acts 4:25).

The autographs have *primal* authority; copies and translations *derive* their authority from the original text rather than from an additional miraculous act of inspiration. The New Testament testifies to the necessary distinction between the autographs and copies. Jesus preached from accepted copies and translations of the text such as the Septuagint, and He accepted them as authoritative Scripture (Luke 4:16–21). He regarded the extant copies of His day as so approximate to the original manuscripts (which no one possessed) that He appealed to those copies as authoritative (Matt 19:4–7 cf. Gen 2:24).

The criteria for all textual reproduction and examination is exemplified in Exodus 32:15–16. God wrote the first tablets of the Law, which later were destroyed. The second copy of the Law was written *according to the first writing* (Deut 10:2, 4). There is no promise in God’s Word for a miraculous, immediate, divine working in the copyists or translators. Such a promise would necessitate continuous miracles each time the Bible was copied or translated. Claiming such a promise would be *adding a new doctrine* to God’s Word. A biblically defined miracle is the *direct* application of God’s power into the universe.^{ix} A work of providence, however, is indirect, as opposed to miraculous intervention. God has promised to preserve His Word through secondary causation (Ps 119:152 *Of old I have known from Your testimonies that You have founded them forever.*), but not through a *miraculous transmission* of the text.

The teaching of preservation logically flows from the doctrine of inspiration; that is, it is a necessary corollary of inspiration. The corollary says that there is no real purpose or value in inspiring a document that is not preserved. **The original text, including its message, has been preserved in the totality of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts.^x On the other hand, no particular translation, manuscript, codex, text type, or family of manuscripts can scripturally claim to be the exclusive domain of the providentially preserved text.**

Why is it necessary to make a distinction between the copies and originals in this regard? An error in a copy or translation reflects on a scribe, copyist, translator, or printer. An error in the original text, however, reflects on the *author*. Therefore, God commands His people to *carefully preserve* His inscripturated words, and He reserves divine judgment for those who intentionally corrupt the text either through addition, subtraction, or misrepresentation (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:5–6; Dan 12:4; Rev 22:18–19). The safeguarding, preserving, and transmission

of God's Word is one of the most serious and demanding responsibilities that God has given to His people, and it requires our utmost effort.

Equally contemptible in God's eyes as adding or subtracting from the original words of Scripture are attempts to corrupt the *message* of the Scriptures. The religious leaders of Christ's day set aside the commandments of God in order to keep their traditions (Mark 7:9). In so doing, they invalidated the Word of God (Mark 7:12). The Jewish leaders of Christ's day held superstitious attitudes toward the text of the OT; yet they intentionally *circumvented the message* of the text and thereby effectively corrupted the text itself. Disobeying the message or refusing to accept its truth as part of one's belief system equals "adulterating" the Word of God (2 Cor 4:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 3:14). Many who have held a Bible in hand have hated God in their hearts. Jesus said, "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" (John 5:39–40, NASB).^{xi}

THE BELIEVER'S CERTAINTY THAT THE SCRIPTURES ARE THE FINAL AUTHORITY FOR BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR

Paul declares that all Scripture is "profitable" or "useful" (ὠφέλιμος; 2 Tim 3:16) in the sense of yielding a practical benefit (1 Tim 4:8; Titus 3:8). This benefit is delineated in four phrases.^{xiii} These phrases are arranged in two pairs, each with a negative and positive aspect. The first pair of words deals with belief (creed) and the second pair with behavior (conduct). The Scriptures are for teaching the truth and refuting error—our belief. The Scriptures are also profitable for reforming one's actions and discipline in right living—our behavior.

The Scriptures Construct Our Faith by Establishing Correct Belief

The Word of God benefits believers by supplying the absolute truth-deposit from which Christians are taught the propositional truth-claims of God (πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, "for doctrine"; 2 Tim 3:16). The Scriptures teach by means of setting forth the whole counsel of God, which is the systematic, unified, non-contradictory body of truth inscripturated in the Bible. Sound doctrine also includes the moral implications which necessarily result from genuine faith in the truth: "For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, *and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine*" (1 Tim 1:10).

Doctrinal preaching has fallen on hard times in some sectors of Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism. The declining doctrinal emphasis in preaching, ministerial training, and ecclesiastical associations is hard to miss, but difficult to prove. Much too often God's objective, inscripturated truth is invalidated by a subjective, non-theological approach to preaching. Fundamentalism historically has used doctrine to define its beliefs and its relationship to a hostile world. The Fundamentalists' understanding of biblical truth has always led the movement to display a militant spirit against the naturalistic age. Christians who fail to recognize the gradual shift from an objective apprehension of truth to a subjective embracing of error are naive to the destructive power such a shift has over the historic Faith. The failure of the experiential to be

anchored to biblical truth surrenders the historic Faith to the whims of human autonomy. Truth, for some, comes by intuition and feeling, rather than by ascertaining God's viewpoint on a particular subject. "I feel" rather than "God says" is the current mantra to theological questions.

To make matters worse, ministers are now regarded as corporate managers and psychotherapists who no longer need precise and thorough theological training. As "professionals" who cater to the world's mind-set of what ministry should be, pastors have unwittingly produced a practical atheism in their congregations based on the erroneous assumption that truth for its own sake is neither relevant nor practical. Rather than theology coming from God's Word, a democratized faith has developed in which each man's intuitions are granted equal value, extending a presumption of common wisdom to all. Like modern politicians, the best pollster today makes the best pastor, one who trims his preaching to fit the popularly held ideas of his audience rather than the truth expressed in the text. It is time for both pulpit and pew to have an understanding of the Faith rooted in an historical, contextual, grammatical, theologically accurate understanding of the biblical text and to correlate that truth with every other truth God has revealed in His Word. A strong revival of doctrinal instruction and preaching is necessary to cure the cancer that is eating away the paper-thin piety that passes for godliness today. In the absence of such a revival, our churches will continue to move toward an entertainment format which will result in losing the "reached" rather than reaching the lost.

The Scriptures Convict by Exposing Incorrect Belief

Paul's unique choice of words (ἐλεγμὸν) which occurs only here in the NT has the sense of "rebuke" (2 Tim 3:16b). In other words, a correct apprehension of Scripture refutes error. Paul expresses the identical concept in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

Erroneous views of doctrine have developed into sharp, sometimes divisive controversies, which in turn have led to emotional, acrimonious exchanges and unnecessary polarization. In bibliology, for example, there exists a wide spectrum of views regarding the King James Version. Some believe the heresy that the *King James translation itself is directly* inspired by God, and that it can be used to correct the Greek text when necessary. Others erroneously claim superiority for the *Textus Receptus* as a doctrine, which must be believed by faith. Fundamentally, the solution reverts back to a correct apprehension of the doctrine of bibliology in order to understand precisely *what* was "God-breathed" when the Holy Spirit gave the Scriptures.

Another prevalent error regarding bibliology is the tendency to replace objective biblical truth with an unbiblical reliance upon personal experience as our spiritual authority. According to George Gallup, the current generation of Christians, instead of looking to the Bible, is seeking for direct communication by the Holy Spirit.^{xiii} This accounts for an increase in "revelations" rather than genuine interest in God's recorded special revelation. The implications of this homespun theology diminish faith in the literal truth of the Bible. The effect of these "illuminations" essentially displaces the authority of the objective meaning of Scripture as determined by sound methods of exegesis and replaces it with a subjective inner experience.

Perhaps this yearning for the experiential in contrast to understanding His revealed truth sheds some light on the general decline in Bible reading in recent decades. The declining interest in the Bible as a *written document* is a popular trend. The 1991 Barna report compared

the responses of 18–25 year olds with those 65 years old and above to several questions. First, both groups agreed in similar numbers with the statement, “The Bible is the written Word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches.”^{xiv}

When asked whether they read the Bible on a daily basis, 31% of the senior citizens said yes; only 4% of the younger generation (18–25) responded affirmatively.^{xv} Barna conducted the same survey one year later, and the results indicated an even greater decline in Bible reading.

In light of the increasing biblical illiteracy in our culture and churches, the responsibility to include sound biblical content, interpretation, and application in preaching is greater now than it was in a more biblically literate culture. Yet the trend is toward skits and rock music in lieu of preaching and teaching. To the extent that people rely upon the presentation, whatever form it may take, it will be the functional authority. Eventually, dilution of belief in the authority of the Bible is inevitable.

Pragmatism also tends to redefine the message of Scripture. “What works,” the most vital concern to modern pragmatists, becomes the ultimate rubric in ministry. Pragmatists, consequently, nullify the authority of Scripture through “Jesuit casuistry”—the end justifies the means. While the Bible lays out a basic methodology in ministry of assembly, prayer, worship, preaching, teaching, witnessing, and serving, it also specifies significant principles governing how these activities are to be done. In the current church growth movement and mission techniques, scriptural methods and principles are being displaced by pragmatic considerations. Rather than going to the Bible, many “ministries” draw primarily on the behavioral sciences instead of biblical truth.^{xvi}

This increasing pragmatism in both Evangelical and Fundamental churches can be seen in the current hymnody emerging out of the cacophony of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), resulting in the diminishment of biblical truth. The New Testament local church must teach and admonish with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as a result of being richly indwelt with the Word of God (Eph 5:18–20; Col 3:16). After all, when people leave the church service, they are humming the songs not the sermon. Believers are indoctrinated through the hymnal as well as the pulpit. Unfortunately, many Christian songs are chosen on the basis of how they make one feel as opposed to what they teach. Pay careful attention to the doctrinal affirmations and omissions of what Christians sing today, and one will ascertain not only what people currently believe, but more importantly what they *will* believe.

The modern pop music of the CCM movement, with its trickle down effect into the Fundamental environment, often preaches a *moral immanence*^{xvii} between the creature and the Creator. The signs are obvious: celebration replaces meditation; praise choruses supplant doctrinal hymns; sloppy attire is purposely worn instead of respectful clothing. Ultimately, one sees a “detheologized” view of the Lord Jesus Christ, an overemphasis on His humanity, and a de-emphasis of His deity and authority. As long as He is the friend and helper who fills human needs, Christians will worship the Son of God with a “Jesus is my boyfriend” demeanor and lyric. A generation from now when large portions of “believers” begin to question either in belief or practice the Lordship, deity, and atoning death of Christ, the “theological mush” of the CCM movement will carry some of the responsibility. One can only hope that this continuous detheologizing of the Christian salvation experience will soon reveal its shallowness for what it is. Only then will a renewed emphasis upon doctrinal preaching and biblical evangelism which calls sinners to a true conversion motivate believers to reverentially express their faith with songs delineating the full spectrum of biblical truth.

The Scriptures Correct by Exposing Aberrant Behavior

“Correction” (ἐπιανόρθωσις, 2 Tim 3:16c) is used in the sense of “setting something right,” most likely with reference to conduct as it was sometimes used in extra biblical literature.^{xviii} God’s Word has the authority to regulate personal and public conduct.

Attitudes and behavior among “Christian” young people toward things once considered wrong and sinful are gradually changing. There has been a noticeable shift in attitudes toward smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, objectionable Hollywood movies, questionable entertainment, rock-music, modern dancing, gambling, romantic physical involvement outside of marriage, androgyny,^{xix} and public immodesty. Richard Quebedeaux, a self-professed new-evangelical, admits in *The Worldly Evangelicals*, “Evangelicals are making more and more compromises with the larger culture.” He adds that “Evangelicals have become harder and harder to distinguish from other people” pointing out that Christian “business people, professionals, and celebrities have found it necessary (and pleasant) to travel the cocktail-party circuit in Beverly Hills.” Finally, he mentions with approval, “Evangelicals have often discovered the pleasure of alcohol and tobacco while studying and traveling in Europe.”^{xx}

What has contributed to this decline? I suggest that a lack of commitment to the ethical message in the Scriptures carries much of the responsibility.^{xxi} The absence of doctrinal, authoritative preaching on sin and the complete depravity of fallen humanity has hastened the moral decline in both Western culture and individual Christians. In 1991 a survey of non-Christians and professing born-again Christians revealed a striking ignorance regarding the biblical understanding of sin. The respondents were asked whether or not they agreed with the following affirmation, “People are basically good.” As one would expect, 83% of the non-believers agreed with that statement. Shockingly, 77% of the “believers” agreed with it^{xxii}—people may sin, but perhaps they are not sinners after all!

A “dysfunctional” view of sin has also revamped preaching and evangelistic strategy. Words like “sin,” “guilt,” and “wickedness” are being replaced with euphemisms such as “mistake,” “estrangement,” “maladjustment,” “indiscretion,” or “imprudence.” “Sin,” in today’s religious world, is no longer against God, but against oneself. Selfishness, rather than being the essence of all sin, has become the goal of redemption. Ministers appeal to self-interest in their preaching because they know that self is what really motivates people. Human-need now beckons the unfulfilled to receive “wholeness” at the foot of the cross. How, one may ask, can anyone actually repent in such an environment? The regression is from the biblical position which says, “I’m *not* O.K., you’re *not* O.K.,” to the popular notion of the seventies, “I’m O.K., you’re O.K.,” culminating in the current self-esteem craze, “I’m O.K., I’m O.K.”—a kind of schizophrenic Pelagianism.^{xxiii} Consequently, sin has not been a popular subject for Christian authors or pastors. A virtual paucity on the subject exists today.

Preaching that ignores repentance of sin in the Gospel or “dumbs down” the volitional aspect of saving faith will supplant the Gospel. As a result, the basic constituency of the church will be unregenerate, culminating in a deterioration of the quality of church life and Christian service to mere externalism (eccentric emphasis on rules) or libertinism (e.g., “Christian” rock concerts, night clubs, sensual dancing, abandonment of dress and music standards, etc.). The

Evangelical and Fundamental landscapes are strewn with the wreckage of churches and church members who have succumbed to a diluted and inevitably, a deleted message.

At some point faithful ministers of the Gospel must recognize the need for speaking out against sin and proclaiming the absolute necessity for the miraculous work of *regenerating grace* in every believer. Man will never bow his knee to Jesus Christ apart from a work of saving grace that transforms the human heart (Matt 13:8, 23; John 3:1–16; 1 John 5:1). If people are invited to accept Jesus Christ just to have their needs met, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to expect something more of them later. Fidelity to a particular text type or translation does not erase infidelity regarding the Gospel message.

The Scriptures Counsel by Establishing Correct Behavior

Finally, God’s Word “trains” or “disciplines in righteousness” (πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, 2 Tim 3:16d). The training is designed to produce conduct whereby “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) becomes a reality in the life of the believer. Holiness literally means, “to cut,” “to separate,” or to be “set apart”.^{xxiv} Theologically it refers to the majestic transcendence of God by emphasizing the distinction between the Creator and the creature. Second, holiness means that God is separate in His being from all that is evil, impure, and defiled.

Righteousness relates to God’s holiness in that it corresponds to God’s purity. Righteousness entails moral integrity of action and disposition according to God’s perfect standard. The term is used here in the simple sense of “right conduct” (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; Rom 6:13; 9:20a). Such training or discipline is designed to bring one’s behavior into conformity to God’s holiness.

Generally, God’s love is emphasized today in Evangelical circles much more than His holiness and righteousness. God is love (1 John 4:7–16). Nevertheless, God’s love is governed by His holiness; otherwise, His love would be reduced to capricious sentimentality. God’s holiness necessitates His judicial wrath against that which is opposed to His character and commands. Psalm 97:10 says, “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil . . .” God hates “every false way” (Ps 119:104). God “hates all workers of iniquity” (Ps 5:5). Conformity to Christ can be summarized in Romans 12:9, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good;” “Hate the evil, and love the good” (Amos 5:15); “And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts . . . for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD” (Zech 8:17).

Likewise, James declares that “friendship” with the world is the height of infidelity with God (James 4:4). God tells His people plainly, “Love not the world” (1 John 2:15), “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:11), and “be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). The world is at total cross-purposes with God, because it is “not of the Father.”

The term *kosmos* (world) emphasizes the *present*, meaning the present arrangement of things. The world is the current, secular mind-set with its ever-changing values, symbols, goals, and priorities. It always emphasizes the “now”—the Pepsi generation. Thus, the world is transient, always on the move, and “passing away.” It believes in “change” for its own sake and the “becomingness” of all things. As such, the world is humanistic, being structured by autonomous man and his “I’m worth it” philosophy. It consists of the desires of modern man’s

sinful, fleshly, and prideful nature, his self-esteem and self-fulfillment syndrome. Worldliness includes both those outward activities and inward affections for and attachment to some aspect of the present arrangement of things. This includes the world's thought patterns, amusements, fads, habits, philosophies, goals, friendships, practices, and lifestyles.

Generally speaking, people today are not impressed with Christianity, primarily because they are not impressed with Christians. If, on the one hand, we are not self-righteous snobs smothered in hypocrisy, then on the other hand we are meaningless religionists blending in with society. In each scenario modern Christians are an offense or a disappointment—and either way, we lose. In contrast to the above, how does the believer combat worldliness and train himself for righteousness? First, Paul says, “make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). The word “provision” (πρόνοιαν) carries the idea of “forethought” which literally means “to have a mind before.” The apostle commands believers not use their intellect sinfully in order to discover various ways to fulfill the desires of the fleshly nature. A man must yield to the Spirit of God and refuse to exercise a fleshly intellect by making forethought to sin.

In addition, believers are admonished to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). Contextually, Paul is concerned with the influence of other people who are succumbing to fleshly activity (2 Cor 6:14–7:2). In this case, believers are not to enter into a spiritual yoke or union with those whose lives are characterized by the fleshly nature. One should never enter an unequally yoked or compromise association that is religious in nature for the sake of money, security, shelter, reputation, or personal advancement. This principle carries over even into non-religious relationships to a lesser degree. One is in the world, but not of it. Believers are not to disassociate themselves altogether from sinners in this world. The goal of relationships with the unregenerate is the salvation of the lost, “plucking” them as branches from the fire, “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23). Yet one must not enter into a yoke where it would be impossible to avoid being negatively influenced and having one's “temple” defiled.

Finally, the people of God are not to abuse or misuse their liberty in Christ as an occasion to fulfill the works of the flesh (Gal 5:13). In this present age believers are not under the Mosaic Law as a governing constitution for the New Testament local church. However, every command and principle in the OT that is rooted in the unchanging character of God, the created order, and/or is repeated or adjusted in the NT carries over into each new, succeeding dispensation. In this sense, the Law of Moses remains a *corroborative witness* to the will of God for believers in the NT church age. Paul's concern here is that believers not abuse their new standing in Christ by using the grace of God as a cloak for sinful, fleshly behavior. Paul revolted against such perverted thinking. Freedom from the Mosaic Law does not imply freedom from commands, principles, precepts, directives, prohibitions, or biblical standards and applications.

How are we trained in righteousness? We are trained by “renewing the mind” in the Word of God. By faith believers seek God's will through the Word of God in every decision (James 4:15). By faith believers reject worldly wisdom (1 Cor 3:18).

Specific directives regarding our attitudes and actions include the moral commands and precepts of God's Word (Exod 20:1–17; 1 Cor 5:9–13; 6:9–10; Gal 5:16–21; Eph 5:1–7; 2 Tim 3:1–5). In addition, God lays down numerous principles by which believers are to make wise decisions regarding our behavior in the world:

1. The principle of enslavement (self-control)

(1 Cor 6:12) “**All things are lawful unto me** (Corinthian slogan of antinomianism^{xxv}), but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, **but I will not be brought under the power of any.**”

(1 Cor 9:27) “**But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection**”

2. The principle of offense

(Rom 14:13–16) “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that **no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way**
{16} **Let not then your good be evil spoken of:**”

(1 Cor 10:32) “**Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God**”

3. The principle of God’s glory

(1 Cor 6:20) “For ye are bought with a price: therefore **glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.**”

4. The principle of a biblically educated conscience

(Rom 14:23) “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: **for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**”

5. The principle of Christ’s name (authority)

(Col 3:17) “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,** giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

6. The principle of corruption by association

(1 Cor 15:33) “Be not deceived: **evil communications corrupt good manners.**”

7. The principle of peace in the Body of Christ

(Col 3:15) “**And let the peace of God rule in your hearts,** to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.”

8. The principle of edification

(Rom 15:1–2) “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. {2} **Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.**”

CONCLUSION

The Bible is fully sufficient for the salvation of man and the development of the believer into full maturity (2 Tim 3:16–17). Through the assimilated Word of God, each man and woman who belongs to God is to be “fully equipped” by the Holy Spirit so that they may know either in precept or in principle what God expects them to believe and how God expects them to behave.

Many churches are in poor health because they feed on junk food, artificial preservatives, and unnatural substitutes, instead of the milk and meat of the Word. Consequently, a worldwide spiritual famine has resulted from the absence of any genuine proclamation of the Word of God (Amos 8:11)—an absence that continues to run wild and unabated. Unless there is a serious correction, the NT Church of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer increasingly from hazy preaching, muddled heads, fretful hearts, and paralyzing uncertainty. As my systematic theology professor often said, “A mist in the pulpit usually results with a fog in the pew.”

On April 18, 1521, in Worms, Germany, a man of God stood before a council that had been convened to determine the orthodoxy of his teachings. Indeed, his teachings had already been declared heretical, and a Papal bull had been issued against him calling for his recantation. If he renounced his teachings, he could safely return to the fold of the church. On one side of the Council were arrayed Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, Jerome Aleander, the Papal Legate, and various German officials including Duke George of Saxony. On the other side stood the accused, and while not without friends and supporters, he alone was on trial. After two days of debate, the fateful question was put directly to him. Being admonished to answer candidly and without evasion, would he renounce the Scriptures as the sole and absolute authority for faith and practice and the message of salvation in Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone?

There are moments in history when time itself appears to stand still, and this was such an occasion. His answer would not only impact his life but the history of Christianity itself. In a voice ringing with conviction, he gave his response:

Since then your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

That man of God was the young Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, who defended the truth of God before the Diet of Worms. “My conscience is captive to the Word of God”—in these words, the principle of *sola scriptura* was enunciated with clarity and passion. It was this conviction, and his willingness to hazard his life in defense of it, that gave us the Reformation. In these days in which we are once again confronting a crisis of authority in many areas of belief and behavior, we must unashamedly take our stand on the principle of *sola scriptura*—Scripture alone! God help us!

ⁱRalph Earle, “2 Timothy,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:409.

ⁱⁱWalter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 165 (hereafter cited as BAGD).

ⁱⁱⁱWarfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 348. Also, see pp. 299–318 for additional evidence of the interchange between “God” and “Scripture.”

^vCharles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 1:154.

^{vi}BAGD, pp. 685–86; Warfield, “*Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*,” p. 284.

^{vii}*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Inspiration,” by C. F. Henry, ed. Walter A. Elwell, p. 145; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1 vol. edition, s.v. “θεόπνευστος,” by E. Schweizer, pp. 894–95; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Inspiration,” by B. B. Warfield, 3:1474.

^{viii} All Scripture is special revelation. All special revelation, however, has not been inscripturated (2 Cor 12:1–4; Deut 29:29; John 21:25 cf. Exod 5:2 and 6:1; Rev 10:1–4; Dan 12:4, 9).

^{ix} The “universe” is defined as *all that is not God*, including everything involved in this time-space-mass continuum.

^x On rare occasions, ancient translations such as the Septuagint et. al. have contributed to our knowledge of the autographic text when resolving an apparent *copyist’s* error. For example, in 1 Samuel 13:1 the Masoretic Text states that Saul was one year of age, שָׁנָה אֶחָדָה — lit. “son of a year” (a Hebrew idiom meaning one year of age), when he began to reign over Israel. Some ancient *Greek* manuscripts which pre-date the Masoretic Text read “thirty years” instead of “one year,” thus harmonizing 1 Samuel 13:1–2 with 1 Samuel 13:3ff; 9:2; 10:1–6 and Acts 13. The Scriptures make it clear that Saul was a full-grown adult when he was anointed King of Israel. In looking at the apparatus in our Hebrew Bible (*BHS*) as well as some additional sources, it reveals that a few manuscripts from the Lucianic Greek recension translate 1 Samuel 13:1 by stating that Saul was “thirty” when he began to reign. The *internal evidence* for supplying “thirty” originates from Scripture passages such as 1 Samuel 13:3ff; 9:2; 10:1–6 and Acts 13. On account of my theological conviction regarding the inerrancy of the autographa, I believe the original Hebrew text also reads “thirty,” even though we do not currently possess a Hebrew manuscript with that reading.

^{xi}The verb “search” can be translated either in the imperative or the indicative (The KJV translates this as imperative). The indicative makes better sense in the context. Here Christ is condemning the Pharisees for their supposed allegiance to the Scriptures while simultaneously rejecting the Lordship and deity of Christ.

^{xii}George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 449.

^{xiii}Walter A. Elwell, “Belief and the Bible: A Crisis of Authority?” *Christianity Today* 24/6 (March 21, 1980), pp. 91–100.

^{xiv}Approximately 51% of the senior citizens and 46% of the 18–25 year olds affirmed the proposition.

^{xv}George Barna, *The Barna Report: What Americans Believe* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991), pp. 292–94.

^{xvi}David J. Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Mission: An Evangelical Perspective on Trends and Issues in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 138–43.

^{xvii}“Moral immanence” is a view that places man and God in an immediate relationship, ignoring the infinite gap between God and man and the separation created by sin.

^{xviii}“Ἐπ'ανόρθωσιν” is only used once in the NT (BAGD, p. 282).

^{xix}“Androgyny” means the removal of male and female characteristics, roles, or dress.

^{xx}Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 12, 14, 118.

^{xxi}God's judicial wrath is similar to the “wrath” of the court when it pronounces sentence on a condemned criminal. Out of the infinite perfections of God's being, He is able to both love and exercise judicial wrath on the condemned sinner at the same time (John 3:16–17).

^{xxii}Barna, *What Americans Believe*, pp. 89–91.

^{xxiii}Pelagianism, a heresy that began early in Church history, denies the depravity and *moral* inability of the human will.

^{xxiv}Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, reprint ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 871.

^{xxv}Antinomianism (literally: against law) is the title given to the view which espouses that because believers are under grace they are not bound by the moral principles and commands of God's Word, therefore they may sin with impunity because God's grace abounds. This view is refuted in Romans 6:1–2.