

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #3, August 28, 2005

***Sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone**

- This is known as the “*formal principle*” of the Reformation. Faith Alone was known and the fundamental principle and this as the formal principle. These two were certainly the centers of the most contested issues between Catholic Romans and Catholic Protestants in the sixteenth century. In many ways, they still are today!
- WHAT DO WE BELIEVE AND TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE?

Grace Fellowship’s Bylaws:

A. Scripture

We believe that the Bible is God’s written revelation of Himself. These Holy Scriptures are perfect as originally given by and from God (“God-breathed”), and are the eternal, inspired, inerrant, infallible, verbal and plenary very Word of God for man. We agree with the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* as further explanation on our view of the Scriptures. **They are the sole authority and truth for all men for all times for all matters of faith and practice.** Properly interpreted, they support or supersede all that follows.

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy:

Summary Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. **Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: It is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.**

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith:

Chapter 1 - THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

1.1 The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule¹ for saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.²

Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence give such clear testimony to the goodness, wisdom and power of God that they leave people without excuse,³ yet they are not sufficient to give the knowledge of God and his will that is necessary for salvation.⁴

Therefore it pleased the Lord to reveal himself at various times and in different ways, and to declare his will to his church.⁵ To ensure the preservation and propagation of the truth, and to establish and support the church against human corruption, the malice of Satan, and the world, he committed his complete revelation to writing. The Holy Scriptures are therefore absolutely indispensable,⁶ for God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.⁷

1.2 The Holy Scriptures, or the Word of God written, consist of all the books of the Old and New Testament. These are:

The Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

The New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation

All of these are given by the inspiration of God to be the rule¹ of faith and life.²

1.3 The books commonly called the Apocrypha were not given by divine inspiration, and are not part of the canon or rule of Scripture. Therefore they have no authority in the church of God, nor are they to be accepted or made use of in any way different from other human writings.¹

1.4 Holy Scripture demands belief, yet its authority does not depend on the testimony of any person or church,¹ but entirely on God its author, who is truth itself. Therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.²

1.5 We may be influenced and persuaded by the testimony of the church of God to hold a high and reverent regard for the Holy Scriptures.¹ Moreover the glory of its contents, the efficacy of its doctrine, the majesty of its style, the agreement among all its parts, the expanse of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full revelation it gives of the only way for human salvation, together with many other incomparable characteristics and its complete perfection—all these arguments provide abundant evidence that it is indeed the Word of God.² Yet, notwithstanding this, our full persuasion and assurance of its infallible truth and divine authority comes from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.³

1.6 The whole revelation of God concerning all things essential for his own glory, human salvation, faith and life, is either explicitly set down or implicitly contained in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing is ever to be added, whether by a new revelation of the Spirit, or by human traditions.¹ Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward enlightenment of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of the things revealed in the Word.² There are also some aspects of the worship of God and of church government common to human activities and organizations which may be determined by the light of nature and Christian common-sense, but in accordance with the general rules of the Word which must always be observed.³

1.7 Not all things in Scripture are equally plain in themselves,¹ nor equally clear to everyone.² Yet those things that are essential to be known, believed and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one place of Scripture or another, that not only the educated but also the uneducated may attain a satisfactory understanding of them by using ordinary means.³

1.8 The Old Testament in Hebrew (the national language of the people of God of ancient Israel)¹ and the New Testament in Greek (the common language of that time) were inspired directly by God, and were kept pure throughout the ages by his particular care and providence. They are therefore authentic,² so that in all religious controversies the church must appeal to them as final.³ But these original languages are not known to all the people of God, who have a right to and an interest in the Scriptures, and who are commanded in the fear of God to read and search them.⁴ They are therefore to be translated into the common language of every nation to which they come,⁵ so that (with the Word of God living richly in all) people may worship God in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope.⁶

1.9 The infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself. Therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any [part of] Scripture (which is not a miscellany, but a unity) it must be understood in the light of other passages that speak more clearly.¹

1.10 The supreme judge by which all religious controversies are to be settled, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, human doctrines and individual thinkers are to be examined, can be none other than the Holy Scriptures delivered by the Spirit. In the verdict of Scripture our faith is finally determined.¹

- **What do YOU believe about the Scriptures? Are they one of your authorities, or are they your sole authority (alone)?**

Before you answer, consider these things: When faced with a decision or debate, have you ever thought or said something like, “My parents always taught me that ...” OR “I have always been taught that....” OR “My pastor says that” OR “My church believes that ...” OR “We as Baptists believe that ...” OR “*WE* have always believed that ...”

Perhaps more stinging and convicting might be to consider if you have ever searched for the answer or resolution to a debate or problem or even a difficult passage of Scripture, and found yourself running to a commentary to see what someone you respect might say and accepting his explanation as the authority without first “searching the Scriptures to see if these things be true”? Like, if Lifeway Press in Nashville says something about an issue, you might feel free to question and analyze it. But what about

if *John MacArthur* says thus and so about something, do you accept it as authoritative on that basis alone?

And to just get into everybody's kitchen and meddle, have you ever found yourself knowing that the Scripture has a certain position or teaching on an issue or behavior, thought or even desire, and yet found yourself thinking that well that is not clear and *many* people see it differently, or that was then and this is now, or besides the world just doesn't work that way, or even that well if I take that position everyone will think I am crazy or I will lose my witness with them; especially when the belief, position or teaching in question will really cost you something and destroy your comfort in the world, your job, your school, your circle of friends or even your family???

- **When we started this study of Grace Distinctives, I thought *Sola Scriptura* or Scripture Alone is the easiest one of the Big 5 Solas or Foundational Principles of Grace oriented, Reformed or Biblical Theology. I mean we are *Grace Fellowship* and everyone here is certainly committed to the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, and that it *alone* is the rule and standard for all matters of faith and practice! In other words, there is no controversy here; no truths in tension; no debate; just a bunch of AMENS! Is that true??**

What do you see as controversial about this principle? Are there any truths in tension here? Are we susceptible to being overly dogmatic or confident about our position on matters related to the Scriptures? After all we are a "Bible believing church" aren't we?

- **What do the Scriptures say about themselves? What testimony or witnesses do they have to their claims to be the Word of God? Does the Bible claim to be the Word of God? Yes!**

Over 2600 times in the OT alone, the Bible asserts that God spoke what is written in its pages. **3808** times the OT writers say what they're saying is the Word of God. From the beginning (in Gen. 1:3) to the end (in Mal. 4:3), and continually throughout, this what Scripture claims.

The phrase "the Word of God" is used over **40 times in the NT**. The NT refers to the OT over 1000 times. The NT writers quote the OT 323 times.

It is called the "Word of Truth", described as "God-breathed, sacred, and holy". It claims to be inerrant, infallible, true, and authoritative.

2Tim. 3:14-16 Note the emphasis on Timothy's "tradition"(things learned and convinced of), which came from the "sacred writings", which are:

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | Theopneustos | | |
| | a. Theos | "God" | b. pneuma "breathed" |
| 2. | Graphe | "writings" | (as defined by the preceding verse) |
| 3. | Pasa | "all" | (past, present, and future) |

"pasa graphe theopneustos" ("all writings God-breathed")

Therefore, all Scripture is **"expired" by God, or "God-breathed".**

Other Scripture references: 2Tim. 3:16, Mat. 5:18, Acts 4:13, Deu. 4:2, Deu. 6:1, Deu. 12:32, Amos 3:7, Rom. 15:4, 2Pet. 1:20-21, Heb. 1:1, Jam. 4:5, Acts 1:16, 2Pet. 3:15-16, Gal. 1:11-12, Eph. 3:3, 1Cor. 11:23, 1Cor. 15:3, 1Ths. 2:13, 1Ths. 4:15, Col. 1:25, 1Tim. 4:1, Tit. 1:3, Rev. 19:9, Rev. 21:5, Rev. 1:3, Rev. 22:18-19, John 5:39, Luke 24:27, Mat. 5:17, Mat. 26:24, Mat. 26:54, John 10:35, Luke 16:17, Luke 18:31, Mat. 22:29-33, Mat. 19:4, Mat. 24:37-38, John 8:56, Luke 16:29, Mark 12:24-27, Rom. 10:14-17, 1Cor. 2:9-16, Col. 3:16

Testimonies to the Bible's authority being from God:

1. **The Bible Writers** repeatedly spoke with an "air of infallibility and authority"; never apologetically nor defensively
2. **Jesus Christ** second, but most important objective witness; His statements proved that He believed Himself to be the theme of all Scripture, that it was literally and verbally inspired, and confirmed it over and over
3. **The Holy Spirit** subjective, but most "convincing" witness; as the One who really enables us to take all the Scriptures as God's Own Word.

Psalm 19:7-14 (NASB) **Note 6 Titles, Characteristics, & Effects of Scripture:**

The **law** of the Lord is **perfect, restoring the soul**;

The **testimony** of the Lord is **sure, making wise the simple**.

[8] The **precepts** of the Lord are **right, rejoicing the heart**;

The **commandment** of the Lord is **pure, enlightening the eyes**.

[9] The **fear** of the Lord is **clean, enduring forever**;

The **judgments** of the Lord are **true**; they are **righteous altogether**.

[10] They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

[11] Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned;

In keeping them there is great reward.

[12] Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. **(justification)**

[13] Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; **(sanctification)**

Let them not rule over me;

Then I shall be blameless, **(glorification)**

And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

[14] Let **the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart**

Be **acceptable in Thy sight**,

O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. **(our response – life by the Word)**

Psalm 138:1-5 (NASB) **Note how God has exalted His Word!**

I will give Thee thanks with all my heart;

I will sing praises to Thee before the gods.

[2] I will bow down toward Thy holy temple,

And give thanks to Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth;

For **Thou hast magnified Thy word according to all Thy name.**

[3] On the day I called Thou didst answer me;

Thou didst make me bold with strength in my soul.

[4] All the kings of the earth will give thanks to Thee, O Lord,

When they have heard the words of Thy mouth.

[5] And they will sing of the ways of the Lord.

For great is the glory of the Lord.

- **But don't most all evangelical Christians, or for that matter even including Roman Catholics, "believe" or affirm that the Scriptures are the Word of God and carry some authority?**
- **What is the real issue here about Scripture Alone? Is this something more than just if the Bible is the Word of God or not, whether it has authority in the lives of Christians and Christ's church?**

The Cambridge Declaration (by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals):

Who are they? A group of leading pastors and theologians who reflect major ecclesiastical and ministry networks in the Reformed or Bible believing community. They include such noted men as Eric Alexander of Scotland, Jerry Bridges the author and teacher in the PCA, Ligon Duncan of Jackson PCA, Sinclair Ferguson of Westminster Theological Seminary in Dallas, Robert Godfrey of Westminster in California, and R. C. Sproul of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando. And they also include such noted Baptists as Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist (a Southern Baptist Church in DC), Al Mohler of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Alistair Begg of Parkside Baptist Church in Cleveland, and John MacArthur of Grace Community Church in LA.

They met in April of 1996 to attempt to start a truly evangelical and Reformed alliance, identify the current theological and ministry issues in the church and culture, and to provide teachings, positions and resources to help the church recover what it had lost in

the area of Biblical foundations. Their resulting statement, *the Cambridge Declaration*, focused on the five solas of the Reformation, identified these five positions and defined them by both affirmations and denials. The first is this one of Scripture Alone.

(Read statements and the *Thesis One* from the Cambridge Declaration)

- Are these concerns and observations still relevant today? Are these affirmations and denials still necessary to define our positions to a world and a church that has lost all concepts of foundational principles or absolute truth? HOW? Explain!
- **First, let's define the principle of Scripture Alone by stating what we are NOT saying about the Bible or its position:**
 1. This does not mean that ALL truth is to be found in the Bible, or that the Bible is the only form through which the truth of God can come to His people. (e.g. scientific truths, historical truths, mathematical truths, etc.; & the garden for Adam & Eve, the prophets for OT saints, the apostles for NT saints, the Holy Spirit for all believers in individual matters that are not clearly addressed by the Scriptures)
 2. This does not mean that every verse in the Bible is equally clear to every reader.
 3. This does not mean that the church and its gifted people are not of great value and help in understanding the Scriptures. (not *solo Scriptura!*)

(View clip from movie *Luther* – at the Diet of Worms)

- **HISTORY of the Debate: The Issue of Tradition – Differing Views**

“Tradition” is a term that can be used (or misused) in a variety of ways. It can refer to a certain school of understanding the Scriptures, such as the “Holy Church’s” tradition and teachings, or the Baptist tradition. It can refer to traditions that are not in the Bible, like Peter being the first Pope or Mary being sinless. It can refer to developing traditions in the history of the church that are clearly not ancient in origin, such as the modern charismatic movement (being touted as the NT church and the full gospel), or like the modern evangelical approach with highly emotionally charged “revivals” or long pressured invitations and altar calls. But usually in the ancient fathers of the church, **“tradition” refers to the standard interpretation of the Bible among the true church. That is the way that we should view it for this discussion.**

- **The debate over authority and sufficiency of the Scripture can really be viewed as one about what is the correct view of tradition and its source.**
 1. **“Tradition I”** a “one source” theory of tradition. This sees the content of Scripture and tradition as being identical. In other words, the teachings or traditions of the Apostles and the Prophets matched exactly the proper interpretations of the Scriptures.

2. **“Tradition II”** a “two source” theory of tradition. This sees Scripture and tradition as being equally authoritative sources of divine revelation. This means that the content of Scripture and tradition may not be identical as they are separate but equal. If the tradition’s source is the churches teaching, then it is also seen as equal to the Scripture in authority. (this was the main view of the Roman church for most of the middle ages and into the time of the Reformation.)
3. **“Tradition III”** a “separate source” theory of tradition. This sees the only source of tradition (and that of Scripture itself also) as being from the “teaching office” (magisterium) of the church. The teaching position of the church is really the ONLY authority as both the Scriptures and the tradition of the church flow from the churches positions. (this has become the dominant position of the Roman church in modern times.)
4. **“Tradition O”** a new theory that basically rejects the concept of tradition. This sees only the individual person as the only one able to interpret the Scriptures correctly for himself and eliminates the need or possibility for any church “tradition.” There is no role for tradition as Scripture is interpreted only on the basis of ones own private judgment. (This has become the most dangerous position of the humanistic modern day church evangelicalism and evangelical “Christian.”)

(Discuss each of these views of tradition and apply to today.)

Ex. of email to friend about doctrine of election. His response was that this was like differing views on **tongues**, and that each individual had to decide for themselves about where they should stand on it. But either way, a sincere and convicted position would be “right” for each person based upon their own convictions. Is this right?

- **What are some illustrations of these controversies and conflicts about Scripture Alone (vs. “tradition”)? What might this mean for such areas as:**
 - a. **Church growth strategies (market driven, felt need issues, entertainment attractions)**
 - b. **Personal growth strategies (purpose driven, man centered)**
 - c. **Gospel presentation (success oriented, HWP gospel)**
 - d. **Church programs and structure (pragmatic, business)**
 - e. **Worship services (Bibliocentric, music doctrine, etc.)**
 - f. **Christian business practices (“badge” concept, for blessings and success – not obedience)**
 - g. **Christian citizenship and involvement (two extremes of no involvement to too much hope in the world systems)**
 - h. **Educational Systems (fight to get prayer into schools, the Bible taught in public schools, etc.)**
 - i. **Etc.**