

# Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)

By Vicar Jake Zabel

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

Sermon text: 2 Timothy 3:10-17

*<sup>10</sup>But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I have endured. And out of them all the Lord has delivered me. <sup>12</sup>Yes, and all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. <sup>13</sup>But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup>But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, <sup>15</sup>and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Book of Concord: *Formula of Concord*, Epitome Pref.1

*We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone.*

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

The *Rules of the AELC* declares that, “*These Holy Scriptures are the only inerrant, infallible, authoritative source, and final rule, norm, and standard for all matters of Christian doctrine, faith, and life.*”

Scripture alone is the source upon which we base all matters of doctrine, faith and the Christian life. As St. Paul said, “all Scripture... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction.” When it comes to doctrine, ethics, and the Christian life, Scripture is and should be our only guide. What we believe, how we act and how we live our lives should be formed by the Holy Bible. This is because the Bible is not just a book written by men. No! The Bible is God’s Word. All of Holy Scripture is God breathed.

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This means that even though every word of Scripture is written by the hands of men, every word of Scripture is divinely inspired and breathed out by the Triune God.

As St. Peter said, “know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Peter 1:20-21) In the Acts of the Apostle, Peter testified to this fact when he said, “this Scripture which the Holy Spirit previously spoke by the mouth of David.” (Acts 1:16)

The Scriptures were written by men but spoken and inspired by God, it is for this reason that Paul says concerning his own teachings and writings, “These things we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches,” (1 Cor. 2:13) and again, “the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord,” (1 Cor. 14:37) and again “the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly, when you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of God.” (Eph. 3:3-4)

The Scriptures, as we have them contained in the Old and New Testaments, are the very Words of God Himself. And not only in part, as if some words were God’s and others were not, but all of Scripture is God breathed. The famous Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard said that “not only the meaning but also each word, the word order, and the entire arrangement is from God.” (*Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy*)

Since Scripture is God’s Word it is true and without error (Psalm 119:160, John 17:17, 21:24). In fact, not only is it without an error, but because it is God’s Word it is unable to contain error, for God does not err and His Word cannot err (John 10:35, 1 Pet. 1:23).

As Scripture is the only inspired, inerrant, and infallible source, it alone is the final authority, rule, norm and standard regarding all matters of doctrine, faith and life.

As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, I have been preaching through the Solas (alones) of the Reformation and for this sermon I will be discussing Sola Scriptura, that is Scripture Alone.

As Lutherans “*We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated*

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*and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New testaments alone.*” (FC Epit. Pref. 1)

This teaching flew contrary to that of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholics believed that the Pope alone could interpret Scripture. A teaching firmly established at the Fifth Lateran Council of 1512-1517, and finally dogmatised as the doctrine of Papal Infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1869-1870.

Prior to this decision the Church had debated the issue of Conciliarism, the belief that the Ecumenical Church Councils were the ultimate authority, even above the pope. The debate of Conciliarism spanned from the 1300’s to the early 1500’s and was sparked by the Papal Schism (or Western Schism) of 1378-1417.

After a conflict between Pope Boniface VIII and King Philip IV of France, a new papacy was established in Avignon from 1305-1377. After this the Papacy moved back to Rome under Pope Gregory XI. However, after Gregory’s death, disputes arose between the Papacy at Avignon and the Papacy at Rome concerning who the true Pope was. After a long rivalry between the two Papacies, the Council of Constance of 1414-1418 ended the schism, reunited the Western Church and ultimately declared that the Church Council was the chief authority regarding doctrine and faith.

This teaching of Conciliarism taught that every Christian, even the Pope, was bound to the decisions of the Church Council. This teaching was official condemned at the Fifth Lateran Council where Pope Julius II reasserted the supremacy of the Pope.

However, Luther taught contrary to this, declaring that “the Word of God, and no one else, not even an angel, should establish articles of faith.” (*Smalcald Articles* 2.2.15)

In Luther’s famous “Here I Stand” speech he declared that he would only repent if he was convinced by “Scripture and plain reason, and not Popes and Councils, which have often contradicted themselves.”

For this Luther was excommunicated by the Pope. This meant that he was not only outside of fellowship with the Roman Church, but in the eyes of the Roman Church Luther was outside of salvation. Luther was also deemed an

outlaw, meaning that anyone could kill him on sight and not be guilty of murder. For preaching the Word of God alone Luther was persecuted.

As Paul said, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” It happened to Paul and it happened to Luther, and it will happen to us also. Paul warned Timothy of the coming persecutions and wickedness.

So many people are lead away from the Word of God, because they have added to it. Whether deliberately or accidently these people have deceived themselves and other into believing doctrines contrary to the Word of God.

All other denominations believe in Prima Scriptura, or Scripture First. They confess that Scripture is their chief authority, but not their sole authority. They believe that Scripture is just the chief source of divine revelation but that there are sources, beyond Scripture, which forms faith, life and doctrine. These other sources include Church traditions, Papal authority, Church Councils, human reason, the surrounding culture, angelic visitations, or personal visions.

These other churches proclaim Scripture is the leading authority for faith, life and doctrine but that our faith, life and doctrines can also be based upon these other sources. Prima Scriptura is nothing other than Scripture Plus.

However, the Lutheran Reformers taught that Scripture Alone is the only guiding rule and principle for evaluating teachings and teachers.

1 John 4:1 tells us to test every spirit, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. We are to test the spirits and their teachings against the teaching of God’s Word, which is our touchstone.

In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul says that if anyone, even us apostles or even an angel from Heaven, was to preach contrary to the gospel you have received let him be accursed. St. Peter confirms that the gospel which was preached by the Apostles was the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:25).

Peter declared that our souls are purified by obedience to the truth, and that truth is the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:22-23, see also John 17:17). Paul warns Timothy to avoid these deceivers and imposters and to cling to the Holy Scriptures which alone are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction.

We are to hold to Scripture alone, because it alone is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. All other forms of tradition, authority, reason and revelations are fallible sources which are not God breathed.

These Churches which claim that Scripture is first and foremost and that these other sources are only secondary, constantly fall into the error of making Scripture second.

The Catholics claimed that Scripture was the chief authority and that the Pope was meant to be the servant of the Word, serving as the interpreter of the Word. But in reality the Pope's authority was not under Scripture but over Scripture. Any interpretation he made was not only equal but above that which was taught in Scripture. However, Lutherans believe in the clarity of Scripture; that God's word is a lamp unto our feet, which give light and understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:105,130) And in the sufficiency of Scripture; that there is no need to look beyond the Word of God. (John 20:31)

The Lutherans declared that there is no need for a divine interpretation of the Pope. Luther once said, that "a simple laymen armed with the Word of God is greater than even the mightiest pope."

Any person with a plain and simple reason, can understand the Word of God. Luther testified that his mind was bound to "Scripture and to plain reason, and not to Popes and Council."

Now, don't get me wrong, I am not putting human reason on the same level as Scripture, as if to teach Scripture plus reason, for that would not be Scripture Alone but Scripture plus. For we need to understand the proper use of reason when it comes to God's Word. Reason should never dictate the meaning of Scripture, but we cannot do away with reason, for reason is how we think and understand.

There are two ways of using reason when reading God's Word, Magisterial (superior) Reason and Ministerial (submissive) Reason. Magisterial Reason uses human knowledge to determine the meaning of Scripture. While Ministerial Reason is a servant to Scripture which allows Scripture to shape our knowledge and tells us what it means.

A historical example of this is the Lutheran-Zwinglian debate over the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. Zwingli used his Magisterial Reason and his human presupposition to determine that "the finite cannot contain the infinite". In other words, it is not logical to believe God can be contained in the physical bread and wine. Zwingli used his human reason to determine that God cannot possibly be presence in the bread and wine, thus the Word of God must be

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teaching something else and the bread and wine must only be symbolic of body and blood.

Luther however, used Ministerial Reason and taught that, God's Word is true, God said this is my body, plain reason tells me that "is" means is; therefore the logical conclusion is that this bread is Christ's body. Luther still used reason, but his reason was subject to God's Word. Luther let the Word of God tell him what it meant instead of using reason to tell God what He really meant.

A modern example of this is the Creation/Evolution debate. Many theologians have been deceived into believing Evolution and have proceeded to deceive others. When reading the Word of God, they come to it with human presuppositions. They place their "scientific reason" above the Word of God. They start with the belief that it is illogical for the world to be created quickly, therefore they conclude that God's Word can't mean what it says and must only be metaphor.

However, when I read Scripture, I allow my human reason to be subordinate to God's Word. Thus when I read that God created the Heavens and the Earth in six days, I use plain reason to determine what that means. My plain reason tells me God's Word is true, God's Word said He created the Heavens and Earth in six day, and that "He created in six days" means He created in six days, therefore He created in six days.

Scripture is clear anyone who reads it using a plain and simple reason can understand it.

However, just because Scripture is clear, doesn't mean that everyone will instantly understand it. Scripture is clear but our human laziness and sinfulness can interfere with that clarity. If a person is too lazy to read and learn they will never understand it correctly. And because of our sinful human minds, we can and will often read our own thoughts and opinions into Scripture and come up with false teachings. Just like the theologian who read his own opinions on Evolution into Scripture and determined Genesis to be a metaphor.

It is for this reason that the Church has found it necessary to produce and hold to Creeds and Confessions. This is why the Lutherans subscribe to the *Book of Concord*.

Hold on a moment. “Isn’t that Prima Scriptura?” you may ask, “isn’t that adding to Scripture?”

This accusation has continually been laid against the Lutherans, we are accused of having a “paper Pope”, that we have just replaced the Pope with the *Book of Concord*.

However, that is a misunderstanding of how we view the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutheran Confessions themselves, testify on how they are to be used, that we make the distinction “that God’s Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle and rule and that no person’s writing can be put on par with it, but that everything must be totally subject to God’s Word.” (FCSD Pref. 9)

A subscription to the Book of Concord is not Prima Scriptura, because the *Book of Concord* is not considered divinely inspired but is considered to be a fallible source. Lutherans believe that the *Book of Concord* is inerrant, without error, and is a true explanation of Holy Scripture. It is because of this reason that we subscribe to the teachings of the *Book of Concord* (aka a *quia* subscription).

However, we believe that the *Book of Concord* is fallible, meaning that the Reformers could have erred in writing it. If errors could be found and proven but Scripture and plain reason, we would reject the *Book of Concord*. Luther said, “if I have erred, then let my errors be shown to me and I will be the first to throw my books into the fire.” So too as Lutherans we confess, “if the *Book of Concord* has erred, then let those errors be shown to us by Scripture and we will be the first to throw it into the fire.”

When rejecting Prima Scriptura (Scriptura First) and promoting Sola Scriptura (Scriptura Alone), we need to avoid the other extreme of promoting Solo Scriptura (Scripture Only). There are some people who think that Scripture Alone, means that we can’t read or use anything outside of Scripture. However, the Lutherans taught that Scripture Alone, “does not mean that other good, useful, pure books that interpret Holy Scripture, refute errors, and explain the articles of faith are to be rejected.” (FCSD Pref.10)

Scripture Alone doesn’t mean that we instantly reject everything outside of Scripture. We don’t reject the Creeds, the Church Fathers, the *Book of Concord*, the Reformers, the Lutheran theologians, just because they are not

Scripture. If we were to reject something just because it is not Scripture, then you shouldn't even be listening to this sermon because it is God's inspired inerrant Word.

But it is based on God's Word. We don't reject something because it isn't Scripture; we reject that which is contrary to Scripture. And we reject any attempt to make these writing equal to or above Scripture. Our Confessions are based on Scripture, not the other way around.

We subscribe to the *Book of Concord* not because it is divinely inspired, but because it is a true and accurate confession of what Scripture teaches, and a clear rejection of what it doesn't teach.

Scripture is clear, but due to human sinfulness and the lies of false teachers, this clarity is hidden from the eyes of average person.

It is for this reason that God has instituted the office of the ministry of the Word to help teach, reproof, correct and instruct the laity. This letter to Timothy was writing to a young pastor. In it Paul is comparing Timothy with the false teachers. He warns Timothy to avoid the false teachers, and to hold onto what he had learned from his teachers (e.g. Paul), so that Timothy can go and teach other the truth of God's Word. Earlier in this letter Paul tells Timothy to be strong in the grace of Christ, and to teach the things he had learnt from Paul to others, who will in turn preach the truth of God's Word to others.

Paul urges Timothy to preach in and out of season, to convince, to rebuke, to exhort with longsuffering and teaching, because the time is coming when people will not endure sound doctrine but according to their own desires will gather around themselves false teachers who will scratch their itching ears and people will turn from the truth to fables. These men have turned from the true Word of God to lies and fables, to their own thoughts and desires. They have deceived many and are deceived themselves.

Many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1), and there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1). They do this by adding to God's Word. Just like the Serpent in the Garden of Eden, they mix God's Word with lies and their own opinions. They do not preach God's Word alone, instead they preach to you Scripture plus.

But as for you dear Christian, hold on to what you have learned and been assured of. Hold on to that which you have received from childhood. Hold on to the Holy Scriptures, for they alone are the true inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. Flee from these teachers, “mark those who cause division and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught, avoid them for such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceived the hearts of the naive.” (Rom. 16:17-18) “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.” (Jer. 23:16)

Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learnt them. Hold on to the Holy Scriptures which alone are able to make you wise onto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, heavenly Father, You have raised from death the Lord Jesus, our great Shepherd, because His death fulfilled Your eternal covenant to save us from sin. We praise You for Your marvellous love and goodness, and pray that You would give us everything we need to know and do Your will, and to live to Your honour and praise. Come into our lives with the power of Your Holy Spirit. Renew in us a true and living faith in Jesus Christ Your Son, so that we may be completely united with Him, trusting not in our own goodness, but in the righteousness based on His death for us.

Keep us from fearing, loving, and trusting anyone or anything more than You. Fill us with love for You, which expresses itself in humble, loving service to our neighbours. Help us to act justly, to love mercy, and to live humbly before You, our God. Move us to show respect to everybody, to be generous to the needy, to share the burdens of the weak, and to act in sincere love to all people. Help us to pattern our lives on Jesus Christ. Make our words

sincere and edifying, our lives pure and godly, and our relationships with others peaceful and harmonious.

Make Your Church so aware of Your countless blessings, especially the gift of the Gospel, that it may continually respond with thanks and praise. Inspire Your people to proclaim Christ's saving love to all mankind. Give pastors a true understanding of Your Word. Give wise judgment to those in positions of leadership. Give us all a loving compassion to people in need. Bless the work of our vicar Jake Zabel, and the fellowship we continue to share with the ULMA.

Bless our country and its people, that mercy, truth, uprightness, and peace may be evident everywhere. Give us leaders whose concern is not to serve personal pride or party loyalties, but to be Your instruments of service to all. Frustrate the efforts of those who promote abortion and homosexuality.

Fill our homes with the joy of Your presence. Inspire parents with the Spirit of Christ, so that they may encourage their children by word and example to live godly lives and to find joy in serving You and their fellowmen.

Bless all good and useful employment. Give to all both satisfaction in what they do and a fair reward for their efforts. Teach people in all situations to remember that they are accountable to You for every word and action. In Your mercy, please send rain to revive the parched land.

Look with pity on those who are facing trouble and trials, especially those Christians who are suffering for the sake of their faith. Strengthen all the needy by Your mighty power, that they may remember that You are their only saviour and help.

Hear our prayers for Jesus' sake, O Lord, that we may praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Ezekiel 33:7-9

<sup>7</sup> “As for you, son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the family of Israel. You shall listen to what I say, and give them a warning from Me! <sup>8</sup> When I tell a wicked person, ‘You wicked person, you will certainly die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked person to turn from his way, that wicked person will die in his wickedness; but I shall hold you responsible for his death. <sup>9</sup> However, if you warn a wicked person to turn from his way, and he has not turned from his way, he will die because of his sin. However, you yourself will have saved your own life.”

Romans 13:1-10

<sup>1</sup> Let everyone be subordinate to the governing authorities! For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist have been ordained by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, he who refuses to subordinate himself to the authority resists God’s ordinance, and those who resist it will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup> For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the governing authority? Do what is right, and it will praise you! <sup>4</sup> For it is God’s servant for your benefit. However, if you do wrong, you should be afraid! For it does not bear the sword for nothing. It is God’s servant, an avenger that is an

agent of wrath to anyone who does wrong. <sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to subordinate oneself, not only because of God’s wrath, but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For that is why you also pay taxes. For they are God’s servants, who attend continually to this work. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what you owe them! If you owe anyone tribute, pay tribute; if taxes, then taxes; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour!

<sup>8</sup> Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another! For the person who loves the other person has fulfilled the Law. <sup>9</sup> For the Commandments, “You shall not commit adultery!” “You shall not murder!” “You shall not steal!” “You shall not covet!” and whatever other Commandment there may be are summed up in this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself!” <sup>10</sup> Love does no harm to the neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the Law.

Matthew 18:1-20

<sup>1</sup> At that hour the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

<sup>2</sup> He called a little child to Him and set him among them. <sup>3</sup> He said, “Truly, I tell you, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Therefore whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>5</sup>

and whoever welcomes one child like this in My name welcomes Me.

<sup>6</sup> “Nevertheless, if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him that a large millstone were hung around his neck and that he were drowned in the deepest part of the sea. <sup>7</sup> How terrible for the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Things that cause people to sin must come, but how terrible for the person through whom the cause for others to sin comes! <sup>8</sup> If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from yourself! It is better for you to go into life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. <sup>9</sup> If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away from yourself! It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell-fire. <sup>10</sup> Be careful that you do not despise one of these little ones! For I tell you that their angels in heaven are always looking at the face of My Father, who is in heaven.

<sup>12</sup> “What do you think? If a man acquires a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that is going astray? <sup>13</sup> If he happens to find it, truly, I tell you that he rejoices more about it than about the ninety-nine that have not gone astray. <sup>14</sup> In the same way your Father

in heaven does not want one of these little ones to be lost.

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and point out his sin to him when you are alone with him! If he listens to you, you have won your brother. <sup>16</sup> However, if he will not listen, take one or two others with you so that you have two or three witnesses to verify every word! <sup>17</sup> If he will not listen to them, tell it to the church! However, if he will not listen even to the church, treat him like a heathen and a tax-collector! <sup>18</sup> Truly, I tell you, whatever you tie up on earth will be tied up in heaven; and whatever you untie on earth will be untied in heaven.

<sup>19</sup> “Again I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about anything at all that they ask, My Father in heaven will do it for them. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three have come together in My name, there I am among them.”