



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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A Stephen Ministry Congregation
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Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 22, 2017

“Scripture Alone”
(2 Timothy 3:15)
Rev. David K. Groth

“From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: O God, the protector of all who trust in You, have mercy on us that with You as our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

If anyone ever asks you what Lutherans believe, you might respond with the three solas: grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone.

We are saved by grace alone, not by works. This grace is received by faith alone, not by our own reason or intellect or decision. And Scripture alone informs our faith, and guides our faith, not Scripture plus tradition, not Scripture plus human reason, but by Scripture alone.

Sola gratia, sola fides, sola Scriptura. Recently, another sola is trying to wiggle into our spiritual lives. This sola is what Ken Klaus of the Lutheran Hour Ministry calls “sola feels” (Daily Devotions, 1/10/17). This “sola feels” is a new way of thinking that says, “My faith is based on how I feel about something.” Sola feels says I don’t really care what Scripture says; What’s important is what my gut telling me. In practical terms, sola feels makes God’s truth in Scripture bow and submit to our feelings.

In other words, sola feels says that if some teaching or doctrine in Scripture makes me uncomfortable, then it must not be true. We’re probably all guilty of this to one degree or another. Our Bibles have holes in them, passages here and there that we simply cut out and tossed aside because we didn’t like them. Luther wrote that some, relying on their own intellect and feelings, “rush into Scripture with dirty feet, like pigs . . . and they move about in Scripture without any reverence” (Plass, 78).

Sola feels. I run up against this all the time. I remember a guy in St. Louis who was leaving his wife and moving in with his girlfriend. When I confronted him, he said, “Pastor, I’ve been praying about this for a long time, and I just feel this is where God is leading me.” Really?

Would God contradict himself in this way? Either the Bible is deceiving him or his feelings are. Which do you think it is?

Another example: In Matthew, Jesus said, “This is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” But sola feels might say “That just doesn’t make sense.” Or “That sounds way too easy considering the guilt of my sin. Surely I have to do something more!”

For many people today, the Bible seems so archaic and intolerant and constraining. Our values today, are so different than they were two thousand years ago, or even fifty years ago. So we are more likely to be offended by the Bible today, particularly on topics like money and sex. For example, Scripture says sex is reserved for the marriage covenant between a man and a woman, but if I feel those verses were written to a different audience 2,000 years ago, and are no longer relevant to me, well then, I can live my life the way I want.

Now, there are countless individuals who for obvious reasons hate those passages that speak on adultery, and their hatred for those verses prompts them to toss the whole Bible aside. But is that really wise? Or could it, in fact, be foolish for a person to reject Scripture just because he doesn’t like what it says about sex? Why not figure out what you believe about the death and resurrection of Jesus first, before taking on the topic of human sexuality?

Besides, are we so sure the values of 2017 are superior to any other moment in history? To reject the Bible as archaic and irrelevant is to assume that we’ve finally arrived. After all these years, as the human race in the progressive West, finally we know what is good and right and beautiful and what is evil, wrong and antiquated. After all these years, we’ve finally come to the point where we can trust our feelings and instincts as a reliable measure of goodness and truth.

But I’m not convinced we’re there yet. In fact, I think the human condition is so messed up that we never will be able to fully trust our feelings and instincts. Besides, they

are fickle little beasts, aren't they? They change . . . rapidly. And like fashions, they keep changing. What is in today may be completely out in just a couple of years.

Remember when the first cell phones came out? They looked like bricks with an antenna. But they made us feel so empowered, so sophisticated, kind of like our cutting edge I-phones and Samsung Galaxies do today. But fifteen years from now if you prance around with a Galaxy S 8, it's going to make you look silly.

Similarly, many of the values and beliefs of our grandparents seem silly to us today, or narrow-minded, even embarrassing. But that process is not going to stop now. Your grandchildren will think many of your values and beliefs are archaic, silly and narrow-minded. The point is, are we so sure that today's values should serve as the plumb line with which we can judge the Bible? Are we so sure that, right now, as a society, we've finally arrived, and can finally trust our feelings and instincts to tell us what is good and beneficial and what is unhealthy and detrimental? Wouldn't it be tragic to throw away God's life-giving Word over something that in a few decades will look weak or wrong?

To reject the Christian faith because parts of Scripture are offensive is to assume that if there is a God, he wouldn't dare have any views that would upset me. But does that assumption make sense? Is it God's duty to make sure he agrees with your opinions? Is it God's contractual obligation to make sure he concurs with your sensitivities? Luther said, "Everybody wants to be God's master, and He must be everybody's pupil" (Plass, p. 72).

Think of it this way. If I didn't allow my wife to contradict me . . . if I didn't allow her to have any opinions other than those I approved of, if I didn't allow her to vote her own conscience but only mine, what kind of a relationship would it be? It certainly wouldn't be a genuine and loving relationship. If we don't trust the Bible enough to let it challenge us, how could we ever have a personal relationship with God? In any truly personal relationship, the other party has to be able to contradict you.

Now, what happens if you eliminate from the Bible everything that offends you? If you pick and choose your way through Scripture, how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? You won't. You'll have a god, but it will be one of your own making, and not a God with whom you can have a genuine relationship. You'll have a god, but it will be an idol carved by your own hands.

Must God agree with you on everything all the time, or does he reserve the right to contradict you, and offend you, and even make you angry? Only if your God can say things that you find uncomfortable, or even outrageous, only then will you know that you have gotten hold of the true God and not an idol. So an authoritative Bible (to which we submit even our reason and our feelings) . . . an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal relationship with God. It is the precondition for it. Luther wrote, "My dear pope, you must not lord it over Scripture, nor must I or anybody else, according to our own ideas . . . We should rather allow Scripture to rule and master us" (Plass, p. 90). "By Scripture alone!"

I remember a woman, a visitor to Good Shepherd. She was considering joining Good Shepherd, but first had some questions about what Lutherans believe. She asked about the fate of unbelievers. I said, "Let's see what Scripture says" and we went to Mark 16 where Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved and whoever does not believe shall be condemned." She said, "Yes, but do people here really believe that?" I said, "Well, we try to adhere to Scripture around here." She looked at me as if something gross had just happened to my face, and she said: "Well, my God would never do such a thing." And, of course, she was right. Her God would never do such a thing.

There is a God who is, who reveals himself to us in Scripture. And there is a god we fabricate if only in our minds, and they are not the same. We need to repent of this, shatter that idol, and keep coming back to the One who reveals himself in Scripture.

Luther wrote, “Men regard and treat the written Word of God in this world just as they do Christ [the incarnate Word]. . . They tear it to pieces, scourge and crucify it, and subject it to all manner of torture until they stretch it sufficiently to apply to their heresy, meaning and whim. . .” (Plass, p. 72).

Friends, remember God isn't out to get us. He's out to save us. Therefore, he has given us his Word. He's given us the Scriptures which “are able to make us wise unto salvation.” We don't want to reject them or edit them or cut parts and pieces out of them as dictated by our feelings. Instead, cling to them. God's Word is your lifeline out there in a twisted and messed up world, a world that isn't going to get any better until Christ returns. Don't let culture shape what you believe yourself and teach your kids. Let Scripture do that instead. Let it teach you how you think as a child of God rather than child of the world. Let it form your faith. Let it direct how you live and love, how you apologize and reconcile, how you forgive, how you serve, how you go about your work. Let Scripture point you to your Savior, who is Jesus. He is the heart and center of Scripture, and therefore the key to its true meaning. Jesus said, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (Jn. 5:39). And Luke wrote, “All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43). So the Scriptures will keep bringing you back to your Savior.

Luther wrote, “God be praised, the Bible itself is now in the hands of the people . . . In this a Christian can nourish himself well. As the saying goes: The cow walks in grass up to the belly. [These days in Wisconsin it's a rare sight, but I always enjoy seeing cattle grazing outside on a beautiful day in deep, lush grass.] Luther continues, “Just so we, too, are truly well supplied in our time with the rich, full pasture of the divine Word. God grant that we gratefully use it and become fat and strong from it, before the drought and the punishment for our ingratitude come. Let us use the Word so that we shall not be obliged to devour stones and thistles

again, as we had to heretofore under the [traditions of men], but that we bring forth much fruit and become the Lord's disciples" (Plass, p.83).

Elsewhere, Luther compares the Scriptures to those strips of linen with which Mary wrapped the infant Jesus. "Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths [of the Scriptures], but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them." (AE 35:236).

Don't reject Scripture or resist it, thereby resisting the Holy Spirit. Just receive the gift of God's Word with humility, hunger, and gratitude. There are parts I don't understand, parts I don't even like, things Jesus said that I wish he hadn't, things Paul wrote that would make my job a lot easier today if he had never written them. But I do believe all Scripture is inspired, breathed out by God, and therefore useful to us, and profitable for us, for our faith and our lives. And moreover, I do believe the promise of God, that God's Word can make us wise, wise unto salvation. Thanks be to God! Amen.

