

Transcript 160

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries, and Jeff, the administrator of Bibleref.com and I are going to continue our series in the the five solos of the Reformation. With the ones we've covered so far of salvation is by grace alone. Salvation is by faith alone and salvation is in Christ alone. Now today we're going to be talking about Scripture alone or otherwise known as sola scriptura. And this one's different in that, one, it's not a matter of salvation. You do not have to believe in Scripture alone to be saved. Now, with that said, I think you'll hear from us today, all three of us view Scripture alone as well, it will be explained to be crucially important. The Bible is our only inspired, inerrant guide to faith and practice. Scripture should impact our traditions and impact our applications, impact so many things. But Scripture alone is not alone in the same sense that grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone are. Now Scripture alone came into the forefront during the reformation.

Shea Houdmann

Probably the most famous quote is by Martin Luther when he was being confronted about his teachings by the Catholic Church, and they were basically asking to recant. Martin Luther's response was, unless, therefore, I'm convinced by the testimony of scripture or by the clearest reasoning. Unless I'm persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted. And unless they render my conscience bound by the word of God, I cannot and will not recant. For it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me, Amen. So in this Martin Luther is declaring his utmost faith is in the teachers of scripture. That can be the only guide for faith and practice that we can trust that will never lead us astray.

Shea Houdmann

Scripture alone is not something that is explicitly taught in Scripture. There is no verse in the Bible that says Scripture alone is the only way to build what you believe. There are passages like a Second Timothy 3:16. That's all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training and righteousness. That teaches of the importance of Scripture. It reminds us that Scripture is what can guide us into truth. Scripture is truth. We can look at a passage like Acts 17:11, where the Bereans took what Paul was teaching, compared it with Scripture. You take First Corinthians 4:6 which says do not go beyond what is written. You can look in a passage like in Mark 7 where Jesus strongly rebukes the Pharisees for nullifying the word of God with their traditions. So there's many passages and scriptures that talk about the the primacy, the priority of Scripture. But again, there is no explicit Scripture alone passage that makes it different by the from the grace alone, faithful in Christ on which there are many as we discussed in the previous episode very clear passages that make that explicitly evident. So Jeff, why don't you take us off here? What do we mean by Scripture alone? And what don't we mean?

Jeff Laird

Yeah, it's it's important to remember that there is a subtle difference there. When we say grace alone, faith loan, Christ alone, and then we say Scripture alone, the alone we're including sort of because it's it's a good pneumonic device. It's a good memory device. It's it's a good speech pattern, but we do mean something subtly different. And what we're really saying is that Scripture is the unassailable absolute authority when it comes to everything. Everything about life, everything about what we believe, everything about faith and practice. That does not mean that everything that God intends us to know about everything is in scripture. It does not mean that a person can simply take a printed copy of the Bible and lock themselves in a closet, and therefore understand everything God would ever want them to understand. It is the cornerstone, it's the foundation. Use an analogy of a chain that if you have truth as the ultimate basis of everything, then scripture is the last final anchoring link in any chain to truth. And you can have other links in the chain. You can have your observations. You can have common

sense. You can have all these other things that they can be part of that chain. But the last final, ultimate thing that has to connect it to truth is scripture. Not two or three different rings together, where there's scripture and tradition and church teaching, you know, all on the same anchor. It's just scripture. So what we really mean when we say Scripture alone is that that's the litmus test. It's the Bible that we use as the ultimate defining understanding of what's true and false. Other things that God has given us and expects us, truly expects us to use in order to properly judge and understand truth are important but those things are never equal to, they don't outweigh, they don't come up against, they don't compare to how we use Scripture. So Scripture is meant to be the final ultimate authority. We understand it or not. Whether we get it right or not. It is still that ultimate authority. So when we say Scripture alone, that's the way we mean it. Not that it is the only thing we're ever supposed to read. Or the only thing we're ever supposed to use, but it is the one and only cornerstone for our understanding of faith.

Kevin Stone

That's right. And the scripture itself presents itself several places as that litmus test for truth. You go back to the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah Chapter 8. Isaiah is addressing the people who were heeding a different source of truth, or at least they were tempted to do so. And so Isaiah writes this, when they say to you, seek those who are mediums and wizards. He asks this question then, should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? And then he says this in verse 20, to the law and to the testimony, if they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. So there's the litmus test. Whatever messages you are hearing, they need to be filtered through. They need to be compared to the standard, which is the word, the law and the testimony, the written word of God. Things have to match up there, and if they don't match up, Isaiah says, then those messages are in the darkness. There's no light in them. And we see this presented in Scripture elsewhere too. James One, verse 22 says do not merely listen to the word, but be doers of the word as well. Why does James say that? Why does James say that we need to do the word because it is the word that is the authority in our lives. It has the right to tell us what to do.

Kevin Stone

And then how many times in Jesus' ministry as he's dealing with the Pharisees and others, does he appeal to the authority of the written word of God? I mean, Jesus is quoting the Old Testament all the time. And we've already mentioned here Mark Chapter 7 where Jesus was pretty stern in his condemnation of the Pharisees. And it had to do first of all with their hand washing requirements, which was a tradition of men, was not found in the Mosaic law. But they required a ceremonial hand washing before eating. Well, Jesus sat down to a meal once, and he bypassed that man-made tradition. And so they were shocked. Why doesn't he wash his hands like we do? Why is he breaking the tradition of the elders? And Jesus says to them, this is Mark 7:8-9 you have let go the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions. And he continued, you have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions. And Jesus quotes from Isaiah in the same passage, and then he goes on to give another example of how their tradition was actually negating some of God's commands. And he said this is wrong. You, God's written word is the authority. It has the priority and you are taking these traditions and setting them on the same level. This is not the way that it should be.

Kevin Stone

But Jesus leaned on the authority of Scripture over and over in his ministry, in his teaching. And he does that with his interactions with Satan in the wilderness. Temptation as well, in Matthew chapter 4. Jesus three times goes to the word of God. That's the authority. And Jesus is in essence saying this is the inerrant word of God. It is trustworthy. It is reliable, it is clear, and it is authoritative and we are responsible to be heeding the written word of God, sola scriptura.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent point, Kevin. Similar also a passage in Isaiah came to my mind while we were preparing for this week and the Isaiah 55:11 which reads, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. This promise about God's word and has give up nothing else. Tradition, traditions can be valid, that they don't have this promise. Human reasoning can be valid does not have this promise. Natural revelation that we can definitely learn from there are many passages in scripture on Psalm 19, Romans 1 that talks about things we can learn from about God from creation. Not that this promise does not apply to those at all. It applies only to scriptures, only God's word that will always accomplish God's purpose. So that's this has a doctrinal thing and it gives us confidence in God's word. But also gives us a practical and that when we're ministering to someone, teaching someone sharing the gospel of someone, we need to be going back to the word over and over again, because it's God's word that has the authority. It's God's word that has the power. It's God's word that never fails.

Shea Houdmann

And his sole scriptura, when you look at the Reformation, what brought this about is this the the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church that developed so many traditions over the centuries they got to a point that Martin Luther and the other reformers are within raised in this are looking at Scripture and looking around at the church that are part of it, like, this doesn't look the same at all. You're reading like the book of Acts and the Epistles for describing, here's what the early church was like, and how in the world did it become what we're seeing today. Some of the doctrinal things are in very, very serious matters. Others were just weird. Others were silly almost, the extent to which they had departed from the word of God. Like the only way to fix this is to go back to what Scripture teaches. And that was why Scripture alone is probably the most famous of the solos in the Reformation, because it was the one that was the most dramatic turn back to here's how we fix this. All these traditions that you cannot verify with Scripture basically toss them all out. Let's go back and start building the church on Scripture alone. Not denying that there will be traditions. Traditions could be good and important. But those scriptures, those traditions have to be solidly founded on God's word.

Jeff Laird

And this is where we get confusion sometimes where where people want to dispute this idea of sola scripture because they say yeah, but you're not really just going with the Bible alone. And that's why we started this whole thing off with saying that we, we mean Scripture alone in a very careful sense. Scripture itself does indicate that you do need other things in order to understand scripture. Matthew 28:19 was not Jesus saying go into the world and print Bibles, he said go make disciples. In Acts 8:30, there's a man who's reading the scripture. One of the apostles says, do you understand what you're reading? He says how can I unless somebody explains it to me. Scripture says that we need discernment. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We need the influence of other mature believers. So there's no question there that things like that, like church tradition and the way we've interpreted things, those are meaningful. And they do tell us something. I mean, we do need some of those things so that our finite minds can understand scripture, but what we can't do is we can't take things like those traditions and and stack them up as if those are points of evidence towards one interpretation. And then these Bible verses or points towards a different interpretation. And see this means that we have all of these traditions and all of these church decrees and all of this common sense, and all of my prophetic dreams weighed against these two or three verses from Scripture. That's that is not how that works. There's infinite weight to what's in Scripture and no weight to what's elsewhere. So we can use these other things as a means to understand. But what we can't do is we can't say well, that's one of the factors that is among the things that I use to understand. So Scripture alone again doesn't have this cartoonish meaning that we literally are never supposed to consider anything else. God wants us to consider other things. But the difference is that we are not supposed to ever treat other things beyond Scripture, as if they are equal in weight or equal in authority.

Kevin Stone

Yes, it's that it's that chain that you were talking about, Jeff, that we get a lot of truth through secondary sources. You know, we'll we'll hear a good preacher. We have a Sunday school teacher. We read a good Christian author. And we are receiving truth from a lot of a lot of sources actually. But what we always have to remember is that the secondary sources should be a conduit from the primary source. And all the secondary sources are dependent on the primary source of truth, which is the word of God. So it is the word of God that makes the secondary sources authoritative. Why is my Sunday school teacher an authority in my life? Well, that Sunday school teacher is an authority only insofar as that Sunday school teacher is accurately handling the word of truth and giving me the the truth of God's word.

Kevin Stone

So what makes a person authoritative is not a claim of Apostolic authority. It's not a spiritual experience that this person had personally. It's not citing a study by Barna or Pew Research. It's not a well reasoned logical argument full of syllogisms even. What makes a person authoritative is the communication of the word of God. What makes Got Questions Ministries an authority on the web? Well, it's not our well written articles. It's not even the vast number of articles that we have available. It's not our Google ranking or anything like that. What makes Got Questions Ministries an authority is simply this, that we are giving the word of God clearly and accurately and saying this is the authority. Scripture is the authority. And we try to make sure that our articles are always full of Scripture. And we're pointing people to scripture all the time because that's the authority.

Shea Houdmann

We'll occasionally get someone who will send in an e-mail and they'll be extra gushy about their praise about Got Questions, but when someone gets to the point where they're trusting Got Questions to the point that they don't question anything that we say anymore, that is the major problem. That is a problem for us. I can genuinely say that is the exact opposite of what we want. We don't want anyone saying well, Got Questions, says this, therefore, I believe is like, no. We want you to if you read our articles, receive an answer from us, watch a video, listen to a podcast, always compare what we say with Scripture. If anything we say anything we argue any point that we make does not align fully with Scripture, reject it. Always scripture overrides anything that we say. We strive truly to keep everything in harmony with scripture, even on issues where it's not something that Scripture explicitly covers. What are the principles we can draw from Scripture that speak to this issue? But no, please, never take anything that Got Questions says in whatever venue we're saying it and just accept it because we said it. Always compare what we say with Scripture and reject it or accept it on that basis. On the basis of whether it agrees with Scripture. That's our heart. That's how we approach our ministry. That's how our focus, that's our priority. That's our utmost desire is to, yes we want to help you find answers to questions. Some of that, that's just us feeding you with what we think is the correct answer, but we never want you to accept what we say just because we say it. Always compared with Scripture.

Kevin Stone

Yes, Got Questions is not infallible or inerrant, but scripture is. People tell me sometimes. Oh, you gotta read Josephus and and so I I so I do. You know I I I consult Josephus and his histories and you know I have no problem reading Josephus. But I also understand that Josephus is not an errant. He is not infallible. You have to read this book by this latest Mega Pastor. OK, well, I'll put it on my reading list. Sounds like a good book, but I will remember that this pastor, this writer is not infallible, and the book that he produced was is not going to be inspired Scripture. I personally love the pilgrims progress. And I I'll I'll read anything that I can get my hands on by John Bunyon. He's one of my heroes of the faith. And I I love the book, the Pilgrims progress, parts one and two. But I understand every time I go back and reread that book that it is not scripture. It is in, it is not infallible. It is not inerrant. And it is only authoritative in its teaching insofar that it is giving the word of God accurately.

Jeff Laird

The thing that I see a lot of people get confused on is is exactly that. Is they tend to blur the lines between the absolute authority of scripture and persons that they trust in order to interpret Scripture. And that gets to a whole nother issue of celebrity worship and so on and so forth that we we wouldn't have time to pack into this, but it's something important to remember that we don't ever want to rely on something explicitly, solely, blindly, just because some preferred authority told us. But there were, there were two brief examples I can think of that also I think helped to illuminate why we need to have the right understanding of this solar scriptura idea.

Jeff Laird

One of them comes from popular culture. And one of the things that we see in the Bible is that God's word says what it says, but that does not mean that people cannot misinterpret it, twist it, or bring it out in the wrong way. We see that when the devil is talking to Jesus, he's quoting scripture when he's talking to Jesus at some places, but he's not using it correctly. Peter talks about how there are people who who twist the scriptures because they're unstable, which is why we need these other things. The pop culture example I can think of is from a movie called the Book of Eli. And it's it's been out long enough that I think that we're past the the spoiler phase. But the basic idea is that the book in question is the Bible. And there is the bad guy of the movie wants to get a hold of the book because it's the last copy that anybody knows of, of the Bible. And his reasoning for that is the words. And in a roundabout way, this bad guy basically says, if you've got those words, you can sort of make people do whatever you want. There's a level of practical truth to that. If nobody knows anything and nobody has anything, then those words can kind of be flexed around a little bit. So God expects us to use the influence of the Holy Spirit, discipleship, and so on and so forth, in order to understand.

Jeff Laird

The other quick example is my experience as a mechanical engineer. I'm not quite in the slide rule generation, but I learned to be an engineer when the Internet was still a kind of a newish thing. And a lot of technology was a newish thing. And I remember there were times we would do calculations and you would look up tables in the back of a book and they would tell you things like trigonometric functions and different things like that. If you did an equation or you did a whole process and you came through and then you went and checked your answer against that chart in the back of the book. If your answer didn't match that chart you knew where the problem was. My my calculations, my experiment, my, whatever. If it doesn't agree with what's in there, clearly I'm the one who made the mistake. Now the flip side of that is that obviously the table in the back of the book is not scripture, it is in, it is theoretically possible that there could be a mistake in there. But when you're a 19 year old student doing calculus and stuff like that, it's much more likely that you're the one who made the mistake. So when we look at Solar Scriptura, it's that same idea. It doesn't matter what sort of personal experience we've had. It doesn't matter what some celebrity pastor said. It doesn't matter what my feelings tell me. Doesn't matter what interpretation of this observation I have. If I go back and compare it to the word and it doesn't agree with what the word says, at the very least I have to understand that there is a problem in how I'm understanding either my observations and my common sense, my dreams or whatever. And how I'm understanding the Bible. It is never a condition where I can say, ah, I can move past the Bible. I can use something different. I can reject it. I can change it. If that's not what Scripture says, it's not what it says and that's kind of the end of it.

Kevin Stone

Guys like 30 years ago I I attended a revival meeting. And it wasn't even in this country. I was abroad at the time. And I went to this revival meeting, you know, hoping to hear a good sermon. And, you know, the word of God preached. Well, the theme of the night was how we know that heaven is real. And so the evangelist got up and he presented his his reason for why heaven was real. And it all had to do with a dream that he had. And he actually made this statement. I know that heaven is real because I saw it in my dream. And I don't. And I kept waiting through the whole thing. He never referenced any scripture

that had to do with heaven. And I was thoroughly disappointed. What a missed opportunity that was. As nice of this as this guy probably was as a person, he was not speaking with authority because my authority in doctrinal matters is not his dream. The authority is only scripture. It is our only rule for faith and practice. And so, you know, dreams come and go. I'm under no obligation to believe somebody's dream. I am obligated to believe what the word of God clearly says. Psalm 119, verse 89 forever oh Lord, your word is settled in heaven. And that is the the standard that is unchanging and is the authority.

Jeff Laird

And that's it's it's, it's good to point out that what the gentleman was saying is not false is, you know, heaven is real. It does exist. So the point is not that we can't hear truth from other sources or that these other things that we see can't can't present true conclusions, but we can't use those as the basis of our authority. You know, that's what really gets us in trouble. And and that's where we have to remember that Scripture does not tell us everything about everything. Even the Bible talks about how there are going to be doubtful issues. There are going to be things that we're going to disagree about. If Scripture told us absolutely every single detail of every little thing, then the Bible wouldn't tell us those things. It wouldn't say the things like it says in Romans 14:1. It wouldn't tell us that we need to, you know, not argue about certain things like Second Timothy 2:23, Titus, 3:9, genealogies and stuff like that. Those are real. Those are objective things. They have correct and incorrect answers, but they're spiritually irrelevant at some point in time. So you know, Scripture alone also does not mean that absolutely every single nuance is always going to have an explicit answer. God is going to tell us what we need to know. What we truly must understand, and he'll make those things clear. And if it's really, really hard for us to tell where the truth lies on that, it's going to be on some subject that's lot fundamental, it's not super important to our, to our faith and our practice. And it's OK for us to recognize that and remember that whatever decisions we're making and however we're doing things on that is not based on God's absolute authority now. Now it's based on our best understanding and our traditions and our preferences, and then categorize things from there. Move from there.

Shea Houdmann

Amen. Excellent examples both of you. And Jeff, I wish I'd had you around and I was taking calculus, but I think at the time you were like 12, so you probably wouldn't have been much help for me in calculus at that time.

Jeff Laird

You just look a lot older than me. You're not that much older than I am.

Shea Houdmann

Thank you, Jeff. So I'm not going to be doing this on every episode. This every once, so I want to just kind of throw like a live fire question at you two and related to sola scriptura is something we're asked quite a bit. I'm sure you guys have dealt with it. So our our Catholic friends always point to and even some of the early reformers warned about this. And that when you throw out the church having sort of authoritative tradition that guides our understanding of scripture, that these scripture paths have to mean this this this is all these things and establish all these traditions that in the hence have equal authority to scripture. When you throw all of that out and say, OK scripture alone, you make it very dependent on the interpreter. And the biggest complaint that we'll hear from our Catholic friends is that solo scriptura has resulted in 30,000 different Protestant denominations. Each who have different beliefs and yet all of whom claim to follow Scripture alone. How would you respond to that particular argument?

Kevin Stone

I guess I would say that we still have the responsibility to correctly handle the word of truth and to study, to show ourselves approved. And and scripture is, is clear on the the mode of salvation and the the what God has done through Christ to to give us salvation. And so the the main things are the plain things. Right? Scriptures very clear on these things. And and this is where this is what binds our

conscience as, as Luther alluded to in his famous statement, we take a look at Scripture and we we know that Jesus saves and it is by grace alone through faith alone and we stand on God's word alone to understand those truths.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, I like that. I one thing that comes to my mind is the idea that God makes it clear in scripture that our faith is an individual issue between us and God. It it simply is. Our salvation, our morality, everything is individual between us and God. Even in the Old Testament, where it says, you know, God punishes to the third and fourth generation those who hate hate me. And that's not about God saying what your grandparents did I'm punishing you for. What it's saying is, if you keep doing things that I told you not to do, even if it's the 3rd, 4th generation. Being told that that's just what I was taught, or that's just how I was raised is not an excuse. God always expects us to pursue truth. He always expects us to maintain an individual pursuit of him. And that's why the Bible tells us that people are noble Act 17:11 for checking to see if things were true. First John 4:1, that we're supposed to test spirits because not every spirit comes from God.

Jeff Laird

We need to rely on good teachers. We need to rely on other people for discipleship. But it is easier for people to be led astray if they just blindly invest their authority in one group, one person, one organization, than it is to have them trust in their own ability. And again, that's sort of a cartoon character. People aren't just saying, well, all I need is me and a Bible. And we also don't have 30,000 meaningfully different interpretations of Scripture. You know, Shea and I today are, there's differences in what we're wearing. There's a little bit of a different color and what Shea's wearing and a little bit of probably of a difference in fabric. But you you wouldn't look and say, oh, they're wearing absolutely, completely, totally, incompatibly different things. We're both wearing dark shirts with a button shirt over it. At what differences there are in there are relatively minor, so the difference is fundamentally in most Protestant denominations are not, they're not at that level.

Jeff Laird

So if we're going to really look at this honestly, we're going to say look, we can either have millions of people saying it's not my job to know, I'm just putting my faith in what that church says or what that group says, or people are going to say I'm trying to understand this the best I can and using those people as my guides and to help me interpret it. And that's what sola scriptura comes down to because that's what God expects of us. It's individual, it's personal and there's no excuse for saying yeah, but that's what the church told me. You're still held accountable for God what you believe.

Shea Houdmann

Amen. Great job, both of you. I mean, this is one of those questions that we have an article on 30,000 Protestant nominations argument and one thing I'll typically point out in a a strive for a very loving manner to our Catholic friends who use this argument, It's like well, one thing all Protestant denominations agree on is that the Roman Catholic Church is desperately, horribly wrong on some very important issues. So at least have that in common. Our whole point in this episode on sola Scriptura, Scripture alone is the point people to the fact that God's word is our sole authority for faith and practice. It doesn't mean we don't get truth from other sources. Scripture even mentioned the other sources we can learn from and through. Scripture alone is the judge. It's the ruler. It's the authority. And that's really what sola scriptura is all about. Jeff, Kevin, thank you for joining for this great conversation today. It's been the Got Questions podcast on Scripture alone. Got questions? The Bibles has answers. We'll help you find them.