

# *Sola Scriptura* in the Strange Land of Evangelicalism: The Peculiar but Necessary Responsibility of Defending *Sola Scriptura* Against Our Own Kind

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“Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men’s books and human teachers.” —Martin Luther

“I approve only of those human institutions which are founded upon the authority of God and derived from Scripture.” —John Calvin

*Sola Scriptura* “is the corner-stone of universal Protestantism; and on it Protestantism stands, or else it falls.” —B. B. Warfield

## INTRODUCTION

“So what if everything in the Bible isn’t true and reliable or from God. That doesn’t really matter, does it? The Bible still remains an authority in my life.” Though it has been years now, I remember hearing these words like it was yesterday. I had no idea what to say in response.<sup>1</sup>

I was shocked because I was hearing these words from a church-going, Bible-carrying, evangelical Christian. This person saw no relation between the truthfulness of Scripture and the authority of Scripture, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

In that moment I realized two things. First, that the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* is just as important today as it was in the sixteenth-century. In the sixteenth-century the Reformers faced off against Rome because the Roman church had elevated tradition and its magisterium to the level of Scripture. Nevertheless, Rome still believed Scripture itself was inspired by God and therefore inerrant, that is, trustworthy, true, and without error.<sup>2</sup>

Since the sixteenth-century, Protestantism (and its view of the Bible) has undergone an evolution in its identity. Movements like the Enlightenment, liberalism, and more recently postmodernism have elevated other voices to the level of Scripture or even above Scripture and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture have been abandoned, something Rome would never have done in the sixteenth-century. Today, many people reject that the Bible is God-breathed and truthful in all it asserts.

As Carl Henry pointed out in his magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, the church throughout history has faced repeated attacks on the Bible from skeptics, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God’s Word now been questioned, criticized, and abandoned by those within the body of Christ.<sup>3</sup> To the Reformers, this would have been unthinkable; yet this is the day we live in. Not only do Bible critics pervade the culture, but now they have mounted the pulpit and sit comfortably in the pews.

If Carl Henry is right, then there is legitimate cause for alarm. Repeated

attacks on Scripture's own character reveal the enmity and hostility toward the God of the Bible within our own souls.<sup>4</sup> One of the most significant needs in the twenty-first century is a call back to the Bible to a posture that encourages reverence, acceptance, and adherence to its authority and message.

Along with the realization that *sola scriptura* is just as applicable today as it was in the sixteenth century, I also saw that many Christians in the church have no idea what *sola scriptura* is or what it entails. What is the relationship of the authority of the Bible to attributes like inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency? Even if we accept that the Bible alone is our final authority, we may have no idea *why* this is true. Is it merely because the Bible is the best guide book we can find?

Questions such as these bring us to the very center of the formal principle of the Reformation and might just help us recover biblical authority for today. Therefore, as we move forward we will (1) return to the sixteenth-century in order to understand Luther's stance for *sola scriptura*, (2) seek to define *sola scriptura* and briefly describe its core components, and (3) turn to address two pressing challenges to *sola scriptura* today.

## MARTIN LUTHER AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

### *"The Scriptures cannot err"*

Historians have often pointed back to Luther's 95 Theses as *the* critical moment, the genesis of the Reformation perhaps. However, in terms of the development of *sola scriptura* the debates Luther engaged in after posting those famous Theses are what really proved to be critical.

First, consider Luther's conflict with Sylvester Prierias, a Dominican theologian appointed by Leo X to respond to Luther's 95 Theses. It became clear to Prierias that authority was the issue at stake in all of Luther's arguments. Prierias wrote in his *Dialogue Concerning the Power of the Pope*, "He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic."<sup>5</sup> Luther responded by pointing out that Prierias cited no Scripture to prove his case and wrote to Prierias, "Like an insidious devil you pervert the Scriptures."<sup>6</sup> Luther exposed the contradictions and corruptions of the papacy by pointing to the examples of Julius II and his "ghastly shedding of blood," as well as the "outrageous tyranny of Boniface

VIII.” Luther then asked Prierias, “If the Church consists representatively in the cardinals, what do you make of a general council of the whole Church?”<sup>7</sup>

It’s important to remember that papal infallibility would not be declared official dogma until the First Vatican Council in 1870. However, Prierias’s response to Luther shows how many already believed the pope was infallible and inerrant whenever he spoke *ex cathedra* (“from the seat” as the Vicar of Christ on earth).<sup>8</sup> As Martin Brecht explains, not only were the Roman church and pope infallible, but “the authority of the church stood explicitly above that of the Scriptures,” even authorizing the Scriptures.<sup>9</sup> On this point Luther disagreed with Prierias, not only appealing to Scripture’s authority, but also to Augustine’s letter to Jerome where the former elevates Scripture’s authority, emphasizing that the Bible alone is inspired by God and without error.<sup>10</sup> The “radicalism” of Luther’s reply to Prierias “lies not in its invective but in its affirmation that the pope might err and a council might err and that only Scripture is the final authority.”<sup>11</sup>

Following his dispute with Prierias, Luther faced off against the Dominican Cardinal Cajetan, perhaps the most impressive theologian of the Roman Curia. They met in October of 1518 after the Imperial Diet of Augsburg and an argument between the two lasted for several days.<sup>12</sup> Luther was commanded to recant, which he would not do. When Cajetan confronted Luther with Pope Clement VI’s bull *Unigenitus* (1343)—a bull that, according to Cajetan, affirmed that “the merits of Christ are a treasure of indulgences”—Luther rejected it along with Pope Clement’s authority. “I am not so audacious,” said Luther, “that for the sake of a single obscure and ambiguous decretal of a human pope I would recede from so many and such clear testimonies of divine Scripture. For, as one of the canon lawyers has said, ‘in a matter of faith not only is a council above a pope but any one of the faithful, if armed with better authority and reason.’” When Cajetan responded that Scripture must be interpreted by the pope who is above not only councils but Scripture itself, Luther replied, “His Holiness abuses Scripture. I deny that he is above Scripture.”<sup>13</sup> Harold Grimm summarizes the conflict this way: “The more Cajetan insisted upon the infallibility of the papacy the more Luther relied upon the authority of Scripture.”<sup>14</sup>

Luther’s greatest challenge would come the following year at the Leipzig debate with the Catholic disputant Johannes von Eck.<sup>15</sup> Though the debate would formally be an engagement between Eck and Andreas Karlstadt, Luther

knew that he would have an opportunity to participate. After all, Eck's real target was Luther himself.<sup>16</sup> In the months leading up to the debate, Luther rigorously prepared himself knowing that papal supremacy was the critical point under debate. In his research Luther had to address two key passages Rome relied upon: (1) In Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus calls Peter the "rock" that he will build his church upon, conferring upon Peter the "keys of the kingdom." According to Rome, here Jesus teaches that Peter is the first Pope, giving to Peter (and his successors by default) the foundational position in the erection of his church. Since Peter (and by implication all future Popes) is given the "keys of the kingdom," the Pope possesses supreme authority and control over the church, and infallibly exercises that authority as the supreme ruler when he teaches as the Vicar of Christ on earth. (2) In John 21:15-19 Jesus tells Peter to "Feed my lambs." Again, Rome saw Jesus as conferring on Peter the exclusive right to exercise power over the church.

Luther, however, rejected these interpretations. He believed that Rome was reading the papacy and its claims to power back into the Bible. In interpreting Matthew 16:18-19, Luther followed the interpretive tradition that applies this promise either to Christ's disciples or to the very faith confessing Jesus as the Christ.<sup>17</sup> As Brecht observes, for Luther the "rock is not any particular church, but the invincible church is wherever the Word of God is heard and believed." "It is faith which possesses the keys, the sacraments, and the authority in the church."<sup>18</sup> And in interpreting Jesus' command to feed his sheep, Luther argued that this has nothing to do with the exclusive power of the Pope, but refers instead to preaching. Luther concluded that neither one of these passages supports papal supremacy. Luther rejected papal infallibility as well as the belief that the Pope exclusively possessed the correct interpretation of the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Rome's twisting of Scripture to bolster its ecclesial power only demonstrated to Luther that a Babylonian captivity had indeed come upon the church.<sup>20</sup>

When it was time for the debate, Eck brought the central issue to the table: Who has final authority, God's Word or the pope? For Eck, Scripture received its authority from the pope. Luther strongly disagreed, arguing instead that Scripture has authority over popes, church fathers, and even church councils, all of which have erred in the past.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, said Luther, not only is Scripture our only infallible authority, but a schoolboy with Scripture in his hand is better fortified than the Pope!<sup>22</sup>

Lest we miss the obvious, it is important for us to note that for Luther *sola scriptura* was directly connected to the *inerrancy* of Scripture. Luther did not use the term “inerrancy” in his writings or in debate, yet the *concept* is present throughout his thinking on the matter.<sup>23</sup> If Scripture is not inerrant, then *sola scriptura* is without a foundation. For Luther, what made the Bible alone the supreme authority was that it was not only inspired by God but as a result of being God-breathed the Scriptures, *and the Scriptures alone, could not and do not err*. On the other hand, church councils and popes can and do err. So while Rome believed Scripture *and* Tradition were inerrant authorities, Luther argued that Scripture *alone* is our inerrant authority from God. As Luther would state in his 1521 treatise “The Misuse of the Mass”:

Since the Fathers have often erred, as you yourself confess, who will make us certain as to where they have not erred, assuming their own reputation is sufficient and should not be weighed and judged according to the Scriptures? ... What if they erred in their interpretation, as well as in their life and writings? In that way you make gods of all that is human in us, and of men themselves; *and the word of men you make equal to the Word of God ... The saints could err in their writings and the sin in their lives, but the Scriptures cannot err.*<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere Luther would argue that the Fathers “have erred, as men will; therefore I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, *which has never erred.*” Luther quotes St. Augustine in support of this point: “I have learned to do only those books that are called the holy Scriptures the honor of believing firmly that *none of their writers has ever erred.*” Therefore, concludes Luther, “Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth.”<sup>25</sup> Luther believed inerrancy was a necessary corollary to *sola scriptura*, and a key component of biblical authority and sufficiency.<sup>26</sup> Contra Rome, Luther protested that God’s Word *alone* was the church’s *flawless* authority. To deny this, Luther believed, was to reject the *sola* of *sola Scriptura*. It was to make the teachings of men equal to the Word of God, as if they too were not only God-breathed but without error.

At Leipzig, Luther was quickly classified as a heretic, joining the ranks of his forerunners John Wycliffe and Jan Hus. “I see that you are following the damned and pestiferous errors of John Wycliffe, who said, ‘It is not

necessary for salvation to believe that the Roman Church is above all others.' And you are espousing the pestilent errors of John Hus, who claimed that Peter neither was nor is the head of the Holy Catholic Church."<sup>27</sup> At first Luther denied such an association with Hus, who was condemned by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake in 1415 as a heretic. But during a break in the debate Luther realized that Hus had taught exactly what he believed about the authority of the church. When he returned to the debate he boldly declared,

It is not in the power of the Roman pontiff or of the Inquisition to construct new articles of faith. No believing Christian can be coerced beyond holy writ. By divine law we are forbidden to believe anything which is not established by divine Scripture or manifest revelation. One of the canon lawyers has said that the opinion of a single private man has more weight than that of the Roman pontiff or an ecclesiastical council if grounded on a better authority or reason.<sup>28</sup>

When Eck responded that Luther was "heretical, erroneous, blasphemous, presumptuous, seditious, and offensive to pious ears" should he defend Hus, Luther then made himself abundantly clear about the fallibility of councils.

I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish new articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other, for the recent Lateran Council has reversed the claim of the councils of Constance and Basel that a council is above a pope. A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. As for the pope's decretal on indulgences I say that neither the Church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and councils.<sup>29</sup>

Luther's stance was further solidified when the debate moved to the topic of purgatory. Eck defended purgatory by appealing to II Maccabees 12:45, but Luther retorted that the Apocrypha was not canonical and therefore was not authoritative.

After the debate, Eck returned to Rome reporting this "Bohemian virus" to the Pope, and Luther left the debate only to become further convinced

that Scripture, not the Pope, was the Christian's final authority.<sup>30</sup> In the end, Luther realized that if the Pope was to have authority over Scripture then reform from within was impossible. As Reeves observes, "The pope's word would always trump God's. In that case, the reign of the antichrist there was sealed, and it was no longer the church of God but the synagogue of Satan."<sup>31</sup>

The Leipzig debate is one of the most pivotal events of the Reformation. Eck's name in German means "corner," and playing off of Eck's name, many at the time believed that Eck had "cornered" Luther, showing from church history that Luther was aligned with the heretic Hus.<sup>32</sup> Yet while Eck may have cornered the reformer, Luther's appeal to Scripture over popes and councils removed the rug of Rome's authority right out from under Eck's feet. Eck appealed to councils, but Luther went to the fountain itself: Scripture and Scripture alone.

### ***Captive to the Word of God***

Tensions escalated, and in 1520 Luther produced several tracts and essays, writing like a madman. In August came *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, calling into question the authority of the pope, specifically the pope's exclusive right to interpret Scripture and call a council.<sup>33</sup> Luther also denied that the church held a monopoly on the proper interpretation of Scripture. Luther rejected papal infallibility and claimed that the pope must answer to Scripture.

In October came *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* where Luther argued that God's gift of righteousness is received by faith alone (*sola fide*), and therefore Rome is in error to claim that divine grace only comes through the priest's distribution of the sacraments (which Luther argued were limited to two rather than seven). Here again Luther gave clear hints of his belief in *sola scriptura*. "What is asserted," Luther protested, "without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed."<sup>34</sup>

The last of the three treatises came in November. In *The Freedom of a Christian*, dedicated to Pope Leo X, Luther positively put forth the idea of an exchange, that our sin is imputed to Christ while Christ's righteousness is credited to us.<sup>35</sup> Luther made it clear that good works do not merit righteousness but are the fruit that comes from being declared righteous.

Prior to any of these three works being published and disseminated, Pope Leo X had issued a papal bull. The decree, made on June 15, 1520, called

Luther's teaching a "poisonous virus" and demanded that Luther recant in 60 days or be excommunicated. The bull was entitled, "*Exsurge, Domine*," with four summons: "Rise up, Lord," "Rise up, Peter," "Rise up, Paul," and "Rise up, all saints." Leo X declared that Luther was a wild boar, ravaging God's vineyard, a pestiferous virus, as well as a serpent creeping through the Lord's field and he must be stopped. His books were to be burned, and should he not recant in sixty days after receiving the bull, he would be declared anathema!

How did Luther respond? After receiving the bull on October 10 of that year, Luther waited sixty days before publicly burning it on December 10, exclaiming, "Because you have confounded the truth of God, today the Lord confounds you. Into the fire with you!"<sup>36</sup> Luther had declared war. There was no going back now. The break with Rome was inevitable. On January 3, 1521, Luther was excommunicated by Leo X in the bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*.<sup>37</sup>

In 1521 Luther was summoned to Worms for an Imperial Diet before Charles V, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire and a committed Roman Catholic. On April 17, a great crowd gathered for the event. To keep Luther safe, he was escorted like a thief through alleys, likely to the rear entrance of the bishop's residence.<sup>38</sup> Wearing the garb of the Augustinian order, Luther appeared before Charles V, who supposedly said upon seeing Luther, "He will not make a heretic out of me."<sup>39</sup>

Luther's publications were set out on a table and he was asked whether he would stand by what he had written or recant. Luther did not take this moment lightly. He feared speaking rashly, not wanting to do harm to God's Word and put his own soul in jeopardy.<sup>40</sup> So Luther asked for time to think about his answer. After thinking the matter through, Luther returned the next day and spoke with boldness, stating that his writings fell into three categories. First, there were books on piety, which were so evangelical that even his enemies acknowledged their usefulness. Second were his books against the papacy, but neither could he recant these since they only spoke against the pope's laws which are contrary to the true gospel. To recant these would be to approve the pope's tyranny! "Good God, what sort of tool of evil and tyranny I then would be!"<sup>41</sup> Third, and last, were his books against specific persons who defended this popish tyranny. But again, he could not recant these for the same reasons. Instead, Luther asked that he be refuted with real proofs of his wrongdoing. The Scriptures, said Luther, should be

determinative in this matter. Should he be shown his errors *from the Scriptures*, he would gladly recant, and not only recant but he would be the first in line to burn his books.<sup>42</sup> By the end of this reply, Luther was sweating profusely due to the hot, overcrowded room.

Johann von der Eck was the official responsible for responding to Luther, and he was not pleased with Luther's reply. He disagreed with the distinctions Luther had made and demanded that Luther recant the heresies taught in these books. Von der Eck was clear that the tradition of the church and its councils could not be questioned by a single individual like Luther.<sup>43</sup> So he demanded that Luther give him a clear answer. Would he recant or not! At that, Luther spoke these famous words:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.<sup>44</sup>

While popes and councils contradict each other, and therefore err, Scripture alone does not err.<sup>45</sup> Scripture, Luther believed, is the *norma normans* (the norming norm), rather than the *norma normata* (the determined, ruled, or normed norm).<sup>46</sup> It is apparent that at Worms Luther rejected the two source theory, which viewed oral tradition as a second, extra-biblical, and inerrant source of divine revelation passed down from the apostles to the magisterium. While Luther greatly valued those Fathers and councils that defended orthodoxy, he argued that Scripture alone is our infallible source of divine revelation.

### **What is *Sola Scriptura*?**

Can we come away from this all-too-brief look at Luther with a definition of *sola scriptura*? Absolutely. For Luther and the Reformers *sola scriptura* meant that *only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church*. Perhaps the best way to unpack this definition is to start at the end and work backwards.

Notice, first of all, that *sola scriptura* means Scripture alone is our *final*

*authority*. Authority is a bad word in our day of rugged individualism. But the Bible is all about authority. In fact, *sola scriptura* means that the Bible is our chief, supreme, and ultimate authority. Notice, however, that I didn't say the Bible is our *only* authority. *Sola scriptura* is too easily confused today with *nuda scriptura*, the view that we should have "No creed but the Bible!"<sup>47</sup> Those who sing this mantra believe that creeds, confessions, the voices of tradition, and those who hold ecclesiastical offices carry no authority in the church. But this was not the Reformers' position, nor should it be equated with *sola scriptura*.

*Sola scriptura* acknowledges that there are other important authorities for the Christian, authorities that should be listened to and followed. Nonetheless, Scripture alone is our *final* authority. It is the authority that rules over and governs all other authorities. It is the authority that has the final say. We could say that while church tradition and church officials play a *ministerial* role, Scripture alone plays a *magisterial* role. This means that all other authorities are only to be followed in as much as they align with Scripture, submit to Scripture, and are seen as subservient to Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority.

Second, *sola scriptura* means Scripture alone is our *sufficient* authority. Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, but it is the authority that provides the believer with all the truth he or she needs for salvation and for following after Christ. The Bible, therefore, is sufficient for faith and practice. As Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "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 complete, equipped for every good work." Or consider The Belgic Confession (1561): "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein."<sup>48</sup> And the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men (2 Tim 3:15-17; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 2:2)."<sup>49</sup> In short, the Bible is enough for us.

Third, *sola scriptura* means that only Scripture, because it is God's *inspired*

Word, is our *inerrant* authority.<sup>50</sup> Notice that the basis of biblical authority—the very reason why Scripture is authoritative—is that God is its divine author. The ground for biblical authority is divine inspiration. As The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “The *authority* of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church, but wholly *upon God* (who is truth itself) *the author thereof*; and therefore it is to be received, *because it is the Word of God* (2 Pet 1:19, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 5:9; 1 Thess 2:13).”<sup>51</sup> Scripture is the church’s final and sufficient authority first and foremost because Scripture *is* the Word of God.

Scripture and Scripture alone (not Scripture *and* tradition) is God-breathed in its totality and on this basis stands unshakable as the church’s final, flawless authority.<sup>52</sup> As Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” Likewise, Peter says in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” It’s on the basis of verbal, plenary inspiration that the Bible stands unshakable as the church’s final, flawless authority. What Scripture says, God says.<sup>53</sup>

To get a full picture of *sola scriptura* we need to go beyond saying that the Bible is inspired or God-breathed. Inspiration should lead in the very next breath to an understanding that the Bible is perfect, flawless, and inerrant. In other words, inerrancy is the necessary corollary of inspiration. They are two sides of the same coin, and it is impossible to divorce one from the other. Because it is God speaking—and he undoubtedly is a God of truth, not error—his Word must be true and trustworthy in all that it addresses. If it is not, naturally we would begin to question whether the Scriptures are really God-breathed after all. God’s words, in other words, reflect who he is, his very character. So, Scripture is rightly referred to as the *Word of God*. This is why Scripture can identify the words of Scripture with God himself. Should his words prove false, untrue, mistaken, that is a reflection of him!<sup>54</sup> But should his words prove true, that is a reflection of his trustworthiness. As the psalmist says, “This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true” (Ps 18:30).

Because inerrancy is a biblical corollary and consequence of divine inspiration—inseparably connected and intertwined—it is a necessary component to *sola scriptura*.<sup>55</sup> The God of truth has breathed out his Word of truth, and

the result is nothing less than a *flawless* authority for the church. In saying this, I am aware that my inclusion of inerrancy in our definition of *sola scriptura* will prove to be controversial given the mixed identity of evangelicalism today. However, should we divorce the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture from its authority, disconnecting the two as if one was unrelated to the other, then we will be left with no doctrine of *sola scriptura* at all. Should Scripture contain errors, it is unclear why we should trust Scripture as our supreme and final authority.<sup>56</sup> And should we limit, modify, or abandon the total inerrancy of Scripture, we set in motion tremendous doubt and uncertainty regarding the Bible's competence as our final authority. The ground for the believer's confidence that all of Scripture is the Word of God is shaken.<sup>57</sup>

Now, we could spend an entire lecture on each aspect of this definition. However, you might have noticed that the subtitle for each of the books in The 5 Solas Series is: *What the Reformers taught and why it still matters*. It is the second half of that phrase that is especially important because in the twenty-first century *sola scriptura* is now facing new challenges, challenges the reformers could not have anticipated; nevertheless, they are challenges we must answer if we have any chance of retaining the formal principle for the next generation. I want to focus on just two challenges that I believe are especially relevant.

## TWO CHALLENGES TO SOLA SCRIPTURA TODAY

### **1. *The challenge to sola scriptura from limited inerrantist evangelicals.***

In all the treatments of *sola scriptura* very few address the question: What does inerrancy have to do with *sola scriptura*? In other words, while many treatments address authority, inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency individually, rarely will you come across one that connects the dots between them. Rarely does someone ask: What do these attributes have to do with *sola scriptura* precisely?

*Sola scriptura* since the Reformation has come under fire by new opponents. The sixteenth century Reformers opposed Rome because she questioned the sufficiency and authority of Scripture by elevating Tradition, believing it to be divine revelation and just as authoritative as Scripture itself. As a result, the distinctiveness and uniqueness of biblical inerrancy was challenged in the sense that Rome claimed that there was a *second* source of divine revelation

that was inerrant, namely, Tradition. To be clear, Rome did not oppose the inerrancy of Scripture. She affirmed it. The point is that Rome's elevation of Tradition as a second inerrant source of revelation was perceived by the Reformers as a major threat to the exclusivity and uniqueness of Scripture as the *sole* inerrant source of written revelation and final authority for the church. The consequence was devastating: When Rome claimed Tradition to be inerrant (not just Scripture), no longer could Scripture be sufficient and authoritative in and of itself. For Rome, Tradition was equally authoritative because it was considered not only revelatory but also inerrant. Rome's elevation of Tradition to the level of inerrancy had significant consequences for her denial of scriptural sufficiency and final authority.

The situation worsened with the advent of the Enlightenment, liberalism, and eventually postmodernism. The very trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Bible *itself* was now being brought into question, something Rome in the sixteenth century was not willing to do.<sup>58</sup> History demonstrates that when Scripture's trustworthiness is rejected, it is not long before Scripture's sufficiency and authority is abandoned as well.<sup>59</sup> Again, notice the inseparable and natural connection between inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency. Critics of the Bible saw no reason why they should believe the Bible was authoritative when that same Bible was not inspired by God but was errant in numerous ways. There could be no "Thus says the Lord" when the Lord didn't really speak and the text that says he did speak was errant to begin with. It made little sense to believe the biblical text was authoritative in what it addressed and asserted when that same biblical text was believed to be errant and uninspired. Whenever this thinking took root, the Reformation understanding of *sola scriptura* was seriously undermined.<sup>60</sup>

And many of these approaches to Scripture continue today, of course. What makes our day so unique—particularly in the world of evangelicalism—is that some have tried to pave a middle way (*via media*) by holding on to biblical authority and sufficiency while denying biblical inerrancy. While there are some who have abandoned the concept of inerrancy completely, others are dissatisfied with it but are not entirely willing to dispense with the term or idea. While this "limited inerrancy" position (as we can call it) may take on a variety of forms and includes a diverse group of advocates, it essentially argues that there are errors in Scripture but when it comes to the Bible's central spiritual message there are not. Limited inerrancy advocates

will maintain that while Scripture may not be perfect in all of its details (especially those of historical or cosmological nature), or in every subject matter it addresses, nevertheless it is trustworthy in its main message and therefore the Bible remains authoritative and sufficient. Notice that advocates of limited inerrancy do not necessarily believe their view precludes the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. In their view, the two remain mutually compatible. This was the view taken by the progressive Neo-Evangelicals at Fuller Seminary in the 1960s, who denied Scripture's full inerrancy yet insisted that Scripture remains the Christian's final authority.<sup>61</sup> Such an approach continues to pervade the academic world today, and has also infiltrated many church pews.

How should we evaluate the "limited inerrancy" position? It is a view that is riddled with inconsistency. As we have seen, to question Scripture's reliability is to also question Scripture's sufficiency and authority. These attributes are intertwined, inseparable, and essential to the existence of one another. One cannot consistently affirm and practice *sola scriptura* while abandoning inerrancy. Indeed, it is because *all* of Scripture is verbally inspired by God, and therefore necessarily without error, that it carries final and ultimate authority and is fully sufficient.

If we think back to the narrative of Luther's progress to the Diet of Worms, we recall that the issue of *sola scriptura* rested on who does and does not err.<sup>62</sup> As we saw in each of Luther's debates, Luther strongly believed that what set Scripture apart in terms of authority was not only its divine inspiration but specifically its absolute perfection and flawlessness, much in contrast to the imperfection of ecclesiastical tradition. Luther believed Scripture alone is our *flawless* authority. "For Luther," observes R. C. Sproul, "the *sola* of *sola Scriptura* was inseparably related to the Scriptures' unique inerrancy. It was because popes could and did err and because councils could and did err that Luther came to realize the supremacy of Scripture. Luther did not despise church authority nor did he repudiate church councils as having no value. ... Luther and the Reformers did not mean by *sola Scriptura* that the Bible is the only authority in the church. Rather, they meant that the Bible is the only *infallible* authority in the church."<sup>63</sup>

It is precisely because God's Word is God-breathed, and therefore necessarily inerrant (i.e., God does not breathe out error) that it possesses unconditional and final authority.<sup>64</sup> *Sola scriptura* means that the Bible alone is our *flawless* authority, something that cannot (and should not) be said

of anything else.<sup>65</sup> The Bible alone is the inerrant source of written divine revelation from God. As Luther believed so emphatically, since church councils, Fathers, and, yes, even popes err, they cannot possess an equal authority to Scripture. Their authority is contingent upon their faithfulness to the biblical text, which alone is inspired and inerrant. At best, they possess a *derivative* authority. Where they are consistent with Scripture, they speak authoritatively. As Luther said, “But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they [the Fathers] have erred as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred.”<sup>66</sup> The Reformers considered inerrancy to be a corollary to *sola scriptura*. In his description of Luther’s theology, Paul Althaus explains, “We may trust unconditionally only in the Word of God and not in the teaching of the fathers; for the teachers of the Church can err and have erred. Scripture never errs. Therefore it alone has unconditional authority.”<sup>67</sup> Sproul is right to conclude, “The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* involved inerrancy.”<sup>68</sup> While some, like Rogers and McKim, have popularized the myth that inerrancy was an invention of Reformed Scholasticism and Old Princeton, John Woodbridge has exploded this myth, demonstrating not only that inerrancy was taught by the Reformers, but has a heritage all the way back to the Fathers.<sup>69</sup>

All of this explains why it is necessary to highlight inerrancy in our explanation and defense of *sola scriptura*. And it explains why it is prominently featured in our definition of *sola scriptura*, that only Scripture, because it is God’s inspired Word, is our *inerrant*, sufficient, and final authority for the church. It’s not just the Reformers who saw (and assumed) this connection between inerrancy and biblical authority. The Reformed tradition at large has followed suit. The Belgic Confession (1561) calls Scripture the “infallible rule” for the church, a statement that combines both Scripture’s perfection and authority in one phrase.<sup>70</sup> Or consider the Church of England, whose Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) assert that councils “may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God.”<sup>71</sup> In contrast, the assumption is that Scripture alone, as God’s inspired Word, does not err, and so it stands supreme in its authority over councils.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) states that the “*infallible rule* of interpretation of Scripture is the *Scripture itself*,” and by “infallible” these Westminster divines did not mean something less than inerrancy as limited inerrantists do today.

Therefore, as the “infallible rule” it alone is the “supreme judge.”<sup>73</sup> The London Baptist Confession (1677), which is largely based on the Westminster Confession of Faith, is just as explicit: “The Holy Scripture is the *only* sufficient, certain, and *infallible rule* of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.”<sup>74</sup>

Reformed theologians and councils today also see inerrancy as essential to our definition and articulation of *sola scriptura*. One of the best examples can be found in The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978), which declares:

Recognition of the *total truth and trustworthiness* of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its *authority*.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup>

The *authority* of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine *inerrancy* is in any way limited or disregarded.<sup>77</sup>

Great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the *total truth* of the Bible whose *authority* one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave *loses its authority*, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one’s critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started.<sup>78</sup>

More recently, this explicit inclusion of inerrancy in an articulation of *sola scriptura* was also affirmed by The Cambridge Declaration (1996), signed by a host of today’s leading Reformed thinkers, all part of The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. Toward the start of this declaration we read: “Scripture alone is the *inerrant* rule of the church’s life,” and we “reaffirm the *inerrant* Scripture to be the *sole* source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience.”<sup>79</sup>

As can be seen from this brief summary of the historical evidence, it would have been unthinkable in ages past to say that Scripture is authoritative, but *not* inerrant. For those who have come out of the Reformation heritage, one necessarily includes the other.<sup>80</sup> After all, how can we trust and submit to the authority of the Bible if we do not believe it is true? Our knowledge

is derivative of the Scriptures, so should we limit or abandon Scripture’s trustworthiness we inevitably bring down the entire structure of theology.<sup>81</sup>

In the midst of the ongoing controversy over inerrancy, Sproul raises an interesting hypothetical (though not one he himself adopts). He notes how someone could argue that Scripture’s elevation as the sole and final authority does not “carry with it the necessary inference that it is inerrant.”<sup>82</sup> One might believe, for example, that popes, councils and Scripture all err, but nevertheless Scripture is the first among equals. “Or Scripture could be regarded as carrying unique authority solely on the basis of its being the primary historical source of the gospel.”<sup>83</sup> Either way, *sola scriptura* is affirmed, but not because Scripture is perfect, but rather because it is primary, either in quality or origin.

Two points need clarification on this position. First, this was not the historic position of the Reformers. Scripture was the sole and final authority not because it was the best of all errant authorities or because it came first, but because its supremacy was derivative of its perfection as divine revelation. Second, it is doubtful that such a person is actually affirming *sola scriptura* (and here I place the emphasis on the word “sola”). Perhaps for him, Scripture, popes, and councils all err; nevertheless, Scripture is the supreme authority because it is the only one of the three that is from God as divine revelation. Scripture, for him, is the first among errant sources.<sup>84</sup> But does this solve the problem for the limited inerrantist? Has he found a way to affirm *sola scriptura* even though he rejects the inerrancy of Scripture?

The answer must be no. For Reformers like Luther and Calvin, to say that Scripture is the sole or final source of authority is an incomplete definition of *sola scriptura*. *Sola scriptura* must mean that Scripture is the sole and final *inerrant* source of authority. If we take out the word “inerrant” we no longer have the doctrine of *sola scriptura* in its totality. Perhaps the point is best seen in the following table, which seeks to pinpoint the dividing line:

**Table 1: Two Views of Authority and Inerrancy**

| FULL INERRANCY VIEW                        | LIMITED INERRANCY VIEW  |
|--|---|
| All of Scripture is our inerrant authority | Only when Scripture addresses matters of faith is it our inerrant authority |

Which one is affirming *sola scriptura*?<sup>85</sup> It is the full inerrancy position. Why? Because the limited inerrancy view can only consistently utilize *sola scriptura* when it believes Scripture's main spiritual message of the Bible is in view, yet, in other areas, where it errs, Scripture is neither inerrant, nor authoritative, nor sufficient.<sup>86</sup> Those errant parts of Scripture don't fall under the banner of *sola scriptura*. Indeed, they cannot. Where the Bible is misguided and wrong, it is impossible for it to speak authoritatively and sufficiently on matters it addresses erroneously. Why would we listen, let alone obey, those parts of the Bible we believe are in error and will somehow mislead us? While the limited inerrantist might appeal to other parts of the Bible—the true parts, that is—he is inconsistent to appeal to the errant parts as “Thus says the Lord” passages. Why? Whether he will acknowledge this or not, it is because authority and sufficiency are naturally bound up with inerrancy. Should one be compromised, the others will follow.

Therefore, because the limited inerrantist limits inerrancy he must also limit *sola scriptura*. The two are inseparable. For the limited inerrantist it is not just inerrancy that is limited, but authority and sufficiency as well.

A final question remains: Can the limited inerrantist truly claim to follow in the legacy of *sola scriptura* or do they have a canon reduction? I have sought to demonstrate that the answer must be no because in limiting inerrancy one must necessarily limit authority as well (if one is going to be consistent at least).<sup>87</sup> But what is the limit that some are placing on the Bible? Typically we find the limit defined as the main salvation message of the Bible. Scripture is no longer the sole and final *flawless* authority in *all* it addresses. The only way for a limited inerrantist to still affirm *sola scriptura* is to modify its meaning to something like: Scripture is the sole and final authority *as far as it is inerrant*.<sup>88</sup>

For the full inerrantist, inerrancy and authority extend to all of Scripture, but for the limited inerrantist, inerrancy and authority extend only to certain parts Scripture. For the full inerrantist, there is no limit to the canon's sufficiency because there is no limit to its perfection, but for the limited inerrantist the sufficiency of the canon is limited to those places where it is perfect.

The position held by the limited inerrantist presents several additional challenges. First, since the limited inerrantist has limited Scripture's perfection and therefore its authority, Scripture must be supplemented. Scripture alone is not enough.<sup>89</sup> The perfection and authority of Scripture have been restricted and there has been a canon reduction.<sup>90</sup> Where Scripture is lacking

in perfection and authority, there must be a supplemental authority to take its place (e.g., reason, experience, tradition, science). At this point the limited inerrantist has deviated from the Reformation, from the evangelical path.

Moreover, should we travel down such a path we have now elevated ourselves and our own reason above Scripture. Once we declare that Scripture is in error, it reveals that we stand above the Bible as a superior authority, acting as judge, declaring the verdict. Unfortunately, this is exactly the position the limited inerrantist has taken, declaring which parts are acceptable and which parts are not. Yet if Scripture truly is our supreme authority, then *ipso facto* no one (and I mean no one!) can stand over and above Scripture as judge.<sup>91</sup> The minute we do so we have removed the *sola* from *Scriptura*, and have placed our own human reason there instead. We simply cannot say that Scripture is our supreme authority and simultaneously judge (as the limited inerrantist does) certain parts of Scripture untrustworthy, unreliable, and errant. If we do, we have now become the supreme, final authority, not Scripture.

Second, canon reduction is not a sustainable option for evangelicals. If we limit inerrancy to some parts of Scripture but not others, then two questions naturally arise: (a) What parts of Scripture are inerrant and therefore authoritative and what parts are not? (b) Who gets to determine what parts of Scripture are inerrant and therefore authoritative and what parts are not? To answer the first question, limited inerrantists will respond by saying that those parts of Scripture that address our faith are inerrant and authoritative. But this presents more problems than solutions. To begin with, how much must we know to be saved? This opens the door for a wide variety of opinions, including those who would answer: very little! And if very little is needed for salvation, then very little of the Bible is actually inerrant.<sup>92</sup>

Additionally, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are now seeking to create a canon within a canon. Given the long history of Protestant liberalism, how do we avoid repeating the practice of throwing away the husk of Scripture in order to find the kernel? For limited inerrantists, the husk is typically the historical or scientific data while the kernel concerns matters related to the main message of Scripture (i.e., matters of “faith and practice”).

However, Scripture never divorces faith from history, the spiritual from the historical. When we look at the big picture of the Bible what we see is that all of redemption is rooted in history, from Adam to the last Adam, from Eden to the New Jerusalem. It is called redemptive *history* for a reason.<sup>93</sup> We

cannot bifurcate matters of faith from matters of history because the two go hand in hand. Moreover, if we do so, Scripture no longer is the determining norm, but our human reason has taken on that role. In the end, the individual decides what parts are from God and what parts are not.

Finally, the limited inerrant viewpoint can be misleading with its emphasis on the macro-purpose of the Bible. We do not deny the distinction between primary and secondary, fundamental and non-fundamental material in Scripture. Indeed, one could go so far as to say that not every passage is directly or explicitly soteriological in nature. Distinctions like these have historically aided Christians and councils in determining what does and does not count as heresy. These distinctions should not lead us to conclude, however, that the Bible is only inerrant in its fundamental, soteriological aspects. This is a misuse of theological categories. As we saw previously, Jesus and his apostles approached *all* of the Old Testament as the very Word of God, having an attitude of total trust and confidence. Jesus and his apostles not only trusted the soteriological, macro-message of the Old Testament, but assumed in every way the reliability of its secondary details (even those historical in nature). In other words, they understood *all* of it to be trustworthy and true.<sup>94</sup>

To conclude, to affirm *sola scriptura* is to affirm inerrancy. These two are mutually dependent upon one another and it is inconsistent to abandon inerrancy and argue that you maintain *sola Scriptura*, at least in the original sense of its meaning. Should we abandon *sola Scriptura*, we no longer stand in the heritage of the Reformation and the evangelical movement. As Greg Bahnsen wisely suggests, “It is impossible to maintain the theological principle of *sola Scriptura* on the basis of limited inerrancy, for an errant authority—being in need of correction by some outside source—cannot serve as the only source and judge of Christian theology.”<sup>95</sup>

## **2. *The challenge to sola scriptura from science.***

The second challenge to *sola scriptura* today comes from the realm of science. Even that statement is not quite accurate, for it gives the impression that Christianity and science are enemies. So perhaps it is more precise to say that this second challenge comes from those who would elevate science to the authoritative status of Scripture itself.

I want to be very clear from the start: Science is a magnificent means through which our reason explores the natural order, makes discoveries, and, if done

rightly, leads us to worship our Creator (Ps. 19:1-6). Therefore, *sola scriptura*, as J. I. Packer warns, should *not* entail a “Bible-without-science” mentality as sometimes is evident in the worst forms of the Fundamentalist movement.<sup>96</sup>

However, today there is the tendency among Christians to elevate science above Scripture, or at least to a place of equal authority. Science, they would argue, is just as authoritative as Scripture, and should be followed in its findings, even if those findings conflict with Scripture. In such a view, Scripture is to be interpreted through the grid of science, not vice versa. Should science and Scripture meet an impasse, Scripture, not science, must be either rejected or reconfigured.

This is not the place to rehearse the long and ongoing debate over evolution since Darwin.<sup>97</sup> However, we should draw attention to the many ways in which the Bible’s authority can be compromised at the expense of adopting evolutionary claims. The twentieth-century has proven that like-minded Christians have disagreed over evolution. Some evangelicals reject evolution entirely as incompatible with who God is and how the Bible says he created the universe, while others seek to retain theism and reconcile it with an evolutionary view of origins, though one initiated and guided by God (i.e., theistic evolution).

Today, however, this debate has escalated into questioning whether or not Adam was a historical person, though in reality this tussle is an old one.<sup>98</sup> Some have gone so far as to conclude that, in light of evolution, the biblical authors were wrong in assuming or affirming a historical Adam. For example, Peter Enns thinks it’s a fool’s errand to try and reconcile evolution with what the biblical authors say about Adam. These two are incompatible and at odds. We must realize, says Enns, that Paul was mistaken when he referred to Adam as a historical person in texts like Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. As a first-century man with a primitive view of the cosmos, Paul naturally thought Adam was a historical person. But we know now, in light of centuries of scientific inquiry (i.e., evolution), that this cannot be the case.<sup>99</sup> Enns’ “we-now-know-better” approach, itself a remnant of the Enlightenment, has led him to give up the doctrine of inerrancy and to reject something as important as the historicity of Adam.<sup>100</sup>

Others approach the Bible with a similar hermeneutic. For example, Kenton L. Sparks believes there is a *trajectory* in Scripture, whereby more recent revelation (New Testament) corrects older revelation (Old Testament)

that is in error.<sup>101</sup> Sparks believes evangelicals are wrong to assume that the Bible has a unified theology. Instead, there is a diversity of theologies at play, and many of these theologies are at odds with one another. Our job, therefore, is to move beyond the Bible and be open to other authorities, including scientific voices, even if they contradict what we read in Scripture.<sup>102</sup> For Sparks, the Bible is full of errors, and not just factual ones but ethical and doctrinal ones as well, some even misrepresenting God himself. We must look outside of the Bible to fields like science to correct Scripture's primitive anthropology.<sup>103</sup> We must come to grips with the reality that science even "trumps" the Bible's teaching.<sup>104</sup>

Enns and Sparks are just two examples of those who have rejected total inerrancy and Scripture's sufficiency. They are honest in their critique, concluding that the Bible just gets it wrong, it cannot be followed, and the Scriptures alone are not enough. Something more is needed, in this case science. When the Bible collides with science, it is the Bible that must give way. As a consequence, *sola scriptura* is undermined and with it the authority and sufficiency of God's Word. Where, exactly, the Christian should follow the Bible ends up becoming a game of "pick and choose." For one person the Bible's affirmation of a historical Adam must go, for another it is the Bible's stance against homosexuality, and yet for another it is Christ's deity or resurrection. Such an approach is not new.<sup>105</sup> It has a long history, and it's hard to see how it avoids postmodern subjectivism, making each individual his own hermeneutical lord.

In the end, science, when done rightly, will always conform to the truths of Scripture. Science, in and of itself, is not an enemy of Scripture. Indeed, science serves to brilliantly support Christianity. Science only becomes problematic when we misuse it and draw false conclusions, conclusions that are incompatible with the truths of God's Word. As with tradition, we must understand science's role as ministerial, rather than magisterial.<sup>106</sup>

### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

We might assume that with the Reformation's recovery of *sola scriptura*, Protestantism had overcome the objections of the Roman church and forever sailed smoothly into the sunset. History, however, tells a very different story! While Luther and Calvin may have succeeded in addressing Rome's papalism

in the sixteenth-century, with the advent of modernism, rationalistic, biblical criticism produced a “new papalism”: the infallibility of the biblical scholar.<sup>107</sup>

The “new papalism” of critical biblical scholarship planted seeds of doubt throughout the biblical text, leading many to wonder if the Bible was truly divine revelation. Where the Reformers urged interpreters to approach the text with reverence and hermeneutical humility, the reader was now encouraged to approach the text as its lord and judge. Consequently, there arose a spiritual deafness, as rationalistic criticism separated man’s witness to God’s Word from revelation itself. “God’s Word was one thing, Holy Scripture was another.”<sup>108</sup> The Bible was now viewed as a collection of fallible books and the Augustinian heritage of the past—which believed that what Scripture says, God says—was discarded. It was now the scholar’s obligation to save the Bible by ridding it of any theological beliefs or assumptions that were out of line with modern scientific methods.<sup>109</sup> Such a critical approach to the Bible continues today, arguing that until inspiration and inerrancy are disposed of, the Bible will never be truly understood.

In the twenty-first century one might be relieved to think that those days are behind us. But are they really? Or do remnants of such approaches to the Bible continue today, arguing that until inspiration and inerrancy are disposed of, the Bible will never be truly set free, let alone understood? If the answer is yes, then how do we, as evangelicals committed to biblical authority, move forward? How do we take strides that do not compromise *sola scriptura* but instead celebrate it in all of its beauty and complexity?

We must be honest about our approach to the Bible. No longer can our starting point be the individual, as if we are the judge who stands over and above Scripture. Whether it be the Enlightenment with its reliance upon autonomous reason, liberalism with its elevation of man’s experience, or postmodernism which has turned Scripture into a wax nose, the individual, not God’s Word, has taken center stage, calling the shots, claiming to be the determining norm.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, *sola scriptura* means we begin by listening to what Scripture has to say about itself, for it claims an authority that comes from God as opposed to one that is derived from man. Rather than imposing a modern or postmodern agenda upon the text, we must have an open ear to the biblical categories that Scripture itself provides in order to guide us in its interpretation.<sup>111</sup> Such an approach seeks to acknowledge the *self-authenticating* nature of Scripture.<sup>112</sup> In other words,

we are seeking to ground authority in the greatest authority that we can find, namely, Scripture itself, for in doing so we are actually grounding Scripture's authority in God, for *he* is its divine author and it is *his* Word.<sup>113</sup> As Calvin said, "God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word ... Scripture is indeed self-authenticated."<sup>114</sup>

*Sola scriptura*—Scripture alone. This formal principle, to echo B. B. Warfield, lies at the foundation of our Christian faith and is nothing less than fundamental to our Christian hope.<sup>115</sup>

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- 1 This article was first presented at The Southern Seminary Theology Conference on September 24-25, 2015 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. Much of it is taken from chapters in Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).
  - 2 Of course, Rome did not use the term "inerrant," but nonetheless the concept itself was affirmed.
  - 3 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 4, *God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part Three* (reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 17, 374.
  - 4 J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (trans. Gerrit Bilkes; ed. M. van der Maas; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 73.
  - 5 Quoted in Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 193. Also see Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 44-52.
  - 6 Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1950), 73.
  - 7 *Ibid.*
  - 8 To clarify, Rome did not believe the pope was infallible and inerrant by virtue of his own righteousness, but only by speaking *ex cathedra*. See Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 110.
  - 9 Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1484-1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 243.
  - 10 George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 111.
  - 11 Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 74.
  - 12 See *Proceedings at Augsburg 1518*, in *LW* 31:253-292.
  - 13 As quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 80. For the debate over the Bull *Unigenitus*, see Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms* (New York: Harper, 1964), 61; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 59-61; Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 252-255.
  - 14 *Proceedings at Augsburg 1518*, in *LW* 31: 256 (cf. 262, 284-285). Also see Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 263-265.
  - 15 See *The Leipzig Debate*, in *LW* 31:307-325.
  - 16 Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 299-322.
  - 17 *Ibid.*, 308.
  - 18 *Ibid.*
  - 19 *Ibid.*
  - 20 *Ibid.*
  - 21 Rupp, *Luther's Progress*, 114.
  - 22 For a more extensive overview of the entire debate, see Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 309-322.
  - 23 For Luther's affirmation of Scripture's inerrancy, see *LW* 1:121; 4:14; 12:242; 22:254, 259; 31:11, 282; 32:11, 98; 35:128, 150; 36:136-137; 39:165. For defenses of the Reformers' affirmation of inerrancy, see Robert D. Preus, "Luther and Biblical Infallibility," in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 99-142; J. Theodore Mueller, "Luther and the Bible," in *Inspiration and Interpretation* (ed. John F. Walvoord; Grand

- Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 87-114; Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); J. I. Packer, "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 143-88; Kenneth Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 115-155; W. Robert Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 225-43; 391-97; Roger R. Nicole, "John Calvin and Inerrancy," *JETS* 25 (1982): 425-42; Eugene F. Klung, "Word and Spirit in Luther Studies since World War II," *TJ S* (1984): 3-46; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 49-100; contra Paul Avis, *In Search of Authority: Anglican Theological Method from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 27.
- 24 Martin Luther, *The Misuse of the Mass*, in *LW* 36:136-137. Emphasis added.
- 25 "If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men's books and human teachers." Martin Luther, *Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, in *LW* 32:11-12. Emphasis added.
- 26 Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 6-7; R. C. Sproul, "Sola Scriptura: Crucial to Evangelicalism," in *Foundations of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 105.
- 27 As cited in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 101. Also see Rupp, *Luther's Progress*, 69; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 87-88.
- 28 Cited in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 102.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation* (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2010), 45.
- 32 Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (rev. ed., Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 81.
- 33 Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, in *LW* 44:115-219.
- 34 Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *LW* 36:29.
- 35 Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *LW* 31:327-378.
- 36 For Luther's rationale, see *Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Were Burned*, in *LW* 31:279-395.
- 37 Oberman, *Luther*, 22-23; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 117.
- 38 Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 452.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 453.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.*, 458.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 *Ibid.*, 460.
- 44 "Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521," in *LW* 32:112.
- 45 Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, 460-461.
- 46 See Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *LW* 36:107.
- 47 See chapter 10 of *God's Word Alone*.
- 48 "The Belgic Confession (1561)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 2, 1552-1566* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 427 (Article VII). Also consider two other confessions: The French Confession (1559) says that Scripture is the "rule of all truth, containing all matters necessarily required for the worship of God and our salvation," and therefore it is not right to "add unto or to take from" from it. "The French Confession (1559)," in *ibid.*, 142 (Article V). And The Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) says, "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." "The Thirty-Nine Articles (1562/63)," in *ibid.*, 755 (Article VI). Or consider The Westminster Confession (1643-1649): "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men (2 Tim 3:15-17; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thess 2:2)." "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693* (ed. James T. Dennison, Jr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 235 (LVI).
- 49 In chapter 10 of *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), I address the complex issue of how we make sense of sufficiency in light of general revelation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and

- extrabiblical sources.
- 50 Some will prefer to use the word “infallible” instead (which does have historical precedent). I am fine with the word “infallible” as long as one means by infallible that Scripture (in total) is not capable of erring. However, I would reject those who would use the word to say that Scripture is only true in its saving message but not in its specifics (e.g., historical details). As I will explain in chapter 8, infallible and inerrant are complimentary and compatible concepts, infallible (i.e., Scripture *cannot* err) being an even stronger word than inerrant (i.e., Scripture *does* not err). Therefore, I think it is historically and biblical erroneous to use infallible to convey something less than inerrancy.
- 51 “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693*, 235 (LIV). Emphasis added.
- 52 In chapter 1 of *God’s Word Alone* I show how Rome differs in its elevation of Tradition as a second infallible source of divine revelation.
- 53 To be clear, inspiration refers to that act whereby the Holy Spirit came upon the authors of Scripture, causing them to write exactly what God intended, while simultaneously preserving each author’s writing style and personality. This supernatural work of the Holy Spirit upon the human authors means that the author’s words are God’s words and therefore are reliable, trustworthy, and authoritative. When we speak of inspiration we can refer to it being both verbal and plenary. Inspiration is verbal meaning that it’s not just the concepts or big ideas that are from God but the very words themselves. Inspiration is plenary too, which means that all of Scripture is inspired by God, as opposed to just some of it or only certain parts. When we put this together we can say that we believe in the “verbal, plenary inspiration” of the Bible.
- 54 “If God speaks erroneous words, how can we escape the conclusion that he deceives us?” John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 552.
- 55 The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy nicely captures the relationship between inspiration and inerrancy: “Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.” “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Normal L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 494 (Point 4 of “A Short Statement”). And again: “We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.” *Ibid.*, 497 (Article XV). Also consider The Evangelical Theological Society: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and *is therefore* inerrant in the autographs.” Emphasis added. Available online: <http://www.etsjets.org/about/constitution#A3>, accessed Sept. 2, 2015.
- 56 Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 547; J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 17.
- 57 Clark H. Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative,” in *God’s Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973), 145, 150, 156.
- 58 It should be qualified that movements like the Enlightenment, liberalism, and postmodernism have influenced Roman Catholicism today, so much so that some post-Vatican II Catholics will question inerrancy. However, other Roman Catholics reject such a move.
- 59 See chapters 2 and 3 of *God’s Word Alone*.
- 60 This was not the case with every individual, obviously. However, I would argue that it proved to be a consistent pattern. See chapters 2 and 3 of *God’s Word Alone*.
- 61 See chapter 3 of *God’s Word Alone* with regard to Fuller Seminary. E.g., Jack Rogers, *Biblical Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977); Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979). It is also an approach that has been utilized by progressive Roman Catholics since Vatican II. Some would argue that there was deliberate ambiguity in its statement, so that Scripture was no longer said to be inerrant in all its assertions. Some saw this ambiguity as a victory for the progressives. See Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 146-148. For the inerrancy debate between Catholics at Vatican II, especially see Cardinal Alois Grillmeier, “The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3 (ed. Herbert Vorgrimler; New York: Crossroad, 1989), 199-246.
- 62 See Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 69.
- 63 R. C. Sproul, *Sola Scriptura: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 17. Also see Rupp, *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, 69; Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 6-7.
- 64 An important point must be made to avoid misunderstanding. I am not assuming that inerrancy is the sufficient ground or basis for authority. While inerrancy is necessary for authority, it is not in and of itself sufficient. To say so would be to deny the role of inspiration as the foundation upon which biblical authority is built. At the same time, this should not lead us to conclude that a denial of inerrancy does not affect authority. It does! Remember, inerrancy is the necessary and natural corollary of inspiration (see chapter 5). As B. B. Warfield demonstrated throughout his writings, if the Bible truly is God’s Word, then, *ipso facto*, it is without error. After all, it is the Word of God, and God is a God of truth, perfect in all that he says. Therefore, inerrancy is necessarily bound up with

biblical authority because it is inseparably connected to biblical inspiration. It is inconceivable, then, to say that Scripture could be authoritative but errant. To the contrary, when we say Scripture speaks with authority what we are really saying is that it speaks with *flawless* authority. All in all, when it comes to Scripture there is no authority without inspiration and there is no inspiration without inerrancy. They all go together and necessarily entail one another. I must give credit to Fred Zaspel who helped me work through this point in personal correspondence. Also see Zaspel's chapter "Bibliology" in *The Theology of B. B. Warfield*, 111-178.

- 65 What about general revelation? It too is a flawless authority, for it is from God. Moreover, there are other forms of revelation outside of the written canon, such as OT and NT miracles, teachings from Jesus not recorded in the Bible, lost epistles by some apostles, etc. However, none of these are canonical and none of these, including general revelation, are sufficient. Therefore, we can conclude that none of these are *sufficiently authoritative* for Christians today. This role belongs to Scripture alone. This point is made beautifully by "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693*, 233 (I.1).
- 66 LW 32:11. For other places where Luther affirms the inerrancy of Scripture see LW 1:121; 4:14; 22:254, 259; 31:11, 282; 32:98; 35:128, 150; 36:136-137; 39:165. For Luther's affirmation of Scripture's perfection in relation to *sola scriptura*, see Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand*, 249-282.
- 67 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 6-7.
- 68 R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 18.
- 69 See chapters 1 and 3 of *God's Word Alone*.
- 70 "The Belgic Confession (1561)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 2, 1552-1566*, 428 (Article VII).
- 71 "The Thirty-Nine Articles (1562/63)," in *ibid.*, 761 (Article XXI).
- 72 This is, in part, why the next sentence reads, "Wherefore things ordained by them [councils] as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scriptures." *Ibid.*
- 73 "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600-1693*, 236 (LIX). Emphasis added.
- 74 "The London Baptist Confession (1677)," in *ibid.*, 532 (I.1). Emphasis added.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 493.
- 76 "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, 494; emphasis added. One might say the Chicago statement is not necessarily Reformed. True. At the same time, most of its representatives were Reformed or at least came out of the Reformation tradition (Lutheran, Reformed Baptists, etc.).
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 This statement is from the statement's "Exposition." *Ibid.*, 502. Emphasis added.
- 79 "The Cambridge Declaration," available from <http://www.alliancenet.org/cambridge-declaration>, accessed Sept. 2, 2015. The declaration was signed by council members such as John Armstrong, Alistair Begg, James M. Boice, W. Robert Godfrey, John D. Hannah, Michael S. Horton, R. Albert Mohler Jr., R. C. Sproul, David Wells, among others. Similarly, consider Reformed theologian Keith Mathison who states, Scripture "is the only inspired and inherently *infallible* norm, and therefore Scripture is the only *final authoritative* norm. ... It is because the Scripture alone is God's inspired and *infallible* Word that Scripture carries unique authority—binding *final authority* of God Himself." He goes on to add: "Scripture's unique, infallible and final authority means that it stands as the Church's supreme norm. This was a primary element of early classical Protestant formulations of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. To Scripture alone can we ascribe the term *norma absoluta*—"absolute norm"—because it is Scripture alone that is God-breathed. The supreme normativity of Scripture is the logical corollary of its inspiration, infallibility, and unique authority. If Scripture truly is the divinely inspired Word of the living God; if it is therefore completely, absolutely, and unconditionally infallible; if it does carry the very authority of God Himself, then it is self-evident that Scripture is our supreme norm or standard." Keith Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001), 260, 264, 266. Also see Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 284
- 80 "To say that the Holy Scripture is the sole source of normative apostolic revelation today is to say that the Holy Scripture has the qualities of perfection and sufficiency." Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 256.
- 81 Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy," 150.
- 82 Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 18.
- 83 *Ibid.*
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 Sproul gives a similar comparison. *Ibid.*, 21.

- 86 Limited inerrantists typically use the phrase “faith and practice” in a way that is contrary to how the Reformers used it. They use it to say that the Bible is inerrant *only when it addresses* matters of faith and practice (notice how this assumes *not all* of the Bible is in view). However, the Reformation tradition has used it to say that the Bible is the only inerrant rule of faith and practice. Notice, however, that the limited inerrantists divides the Bible into two categories: one that addresses issues of faith and practice and one that is occupied with everything else. This is convenient because it then allows the limited inerrants to affirm inerrancy while simultaneously denying that inerrancy applies to *all* of the Bible. In contrast, the Reformers and the Reformed tradition have never divided Scripture up like this and nor should we. Scripture itself never imposes this distinction. Instead, we should say that the Bible is inerrant in all that it addresses (see chapter 8 of *God’s Word Alone*). Saying that the Bible is the inerrant rule of faith and practice was never meant to limit inerrancy but rather expand it so that the Bible applies to all of life. (To clarify, I am not saying that the Bible explicitly or directly addresses every detail of life and the world. It does not [e.g., physics]. However, in what the Bible does address it does so inerrantly. Furthermore, we should pay heed to the Westminster Confession [I.VI] when it says that the Bible is authoritative not only in a direct sense [what is expressly set down in Scripture], but also in what may be deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence.)
- 87 On the other hand, it should be qualified that an affirmation of inerrancy does not guarantee that one affirms *sola scriptura*. Roman Catholicism is a case in point. See John D. Woodbridge, “Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century* (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 113-122.
- 88 Limited inerrantists will prefer to use the word “infallible” instead because they mean by it something far less than inerrancy (i.e., Scripture is infallible in its spiritual message, but not in its totality). However, their appeal to use the word “infallible” for such a purpose only proves my point above, namely, that for the limited inerrantist authority cannot apply to the Bible in its totality, but must be restricted to those portions we know are true.
- 89 Limited inerrantists may object that they believe Scripture is enough for *faith and practice*. But this only brings us back to the original problem of canon reduction. If Scripture can err in apparently insignificant historical details, for example, why would we assume it will “get it right” when it comes to the significant matters of life, like faith and practice? It is hard not to conclude that the limited inerrantist is determining his own canon within a canon.
- 90 Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 33.
- 91 Credit must be given to Fred Zaspel who thought through this point with me in personal correspondence. Not surprisingly, this is a very Warfieldian point!
- 92 Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 150.
- 93 Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 34.
- 94 Pinnock, “Limited Inerrancy,” 149.
- 95 Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. Normal L. Geisler; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 183-184. Also consider Saucy who says that inerrancy “logically upholds the final authority of all of Scripture. Only truth has authority, and because the Scriptures are completely true they command ultimate authority.” Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 161. Likewise Sproul: “*Sola Scriptura* as the supreme norm of ecclesiastical authority rests ultimately on the premise of the infallibility of the Word of God.” Sproul, *Sola Scriptura*, 21.
- 96 J. I. Packer, “The Bible in Use: Evangelicals Seeking Truth from Holy Scripture,” in *Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 78.
- 97 Alister E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 21-26, 187-193.
- 98 For the various views in this debate, see Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, eds., *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).
- 99 Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), especially chapters 5-7, and the Nine theses in the Conclusion.
- 100 Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 83-141; idem, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014).
- 101 Kenton L. Sparks, *Sacred Word Broken Word: Biblical Authority & the Dark Side of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 114-117. Also see idem, *God’s Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). For a response, see Albert Mohler Jr., “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, especially 55; Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Embattled Bible: Four More Books,” *Themelios* 34.1 (2009): 6-25.
- 102 Sparks, *Sacred Word Broken Word*, 33-39, 91.

- 103 Ibid., 92.
- 104 Ibid., 116, 135.
- 105 See chapter 2 of *God's Word Alone*.
- 106 For an example of such an approach, see Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).
- 107 J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 26-27.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Ibid., 28.
- 111 Notice how our approach differs from Sparks and Enns who say we should approach Scripture by interrogating it or as if we are engaging in a wrestling match. Sparks, *Sacred Word Broken Word*, 30, 39; Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So*, 22-23.
- 112 It is sometimes referred to as the "self-attestation" of Scripture. Some, like James Barr, have rejected this doctrine (*Fundamentalism* [London: SCM, 1977], 78). However, evangelicals have affirmed it: Sinclair Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (ed. Conn, Harvie M.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 47-66; Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D.A. Carson and John Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 19-59; John Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself, in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 178-181.
- 113 Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 89.
- 114 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.7.4-5. Also see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-1997), 1:89.
- 115 Here I echo Warfield who said: "The trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine, and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life." Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, reprinted 2003), 67.