

**2 Timothy 3** <sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

**Matthew 5:** <sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Luke 24** <sup>25</sup> He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

The Reformation was one of the most powerful and influential movements in the life of the western Church in the last 1000 years and it could be said to have begun on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 – the day Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door of All Saints, Wittenberg

So in the weeks leading up to and just after the 500th Anniversary of the start of the Reformation on 31st October, we shall be looking at the Five great principles of the Reformation are the Five 'solas' or 'alones'. These are: Christ Alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone, God's Glory Alone - and today we begin by looking at *Sola Scriptura* - Scripture Alone,

In 1521, 4 years after Wittenberg, Martin Luther, was summoned to appear in Worms before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V to defend what he had taught and written. Soon after he arrived, it was clear that he wasn't brought there to defend his views; he was brought there to recant his views. Laid out on the table were 25 books or articles that Martin Luther had written. Luther replied, "The works are mine, but ... Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other--my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." For Luther, it was all about the Bible. It was all about the teaching of the Scripture. He didn't trust the pope. He didn't trust the councils. He trusted in the Scriptures alone. Now the important thing for us is that this was not just Luther's view of scripture it was **Jesus'** view.

J would have been brought up in synagogue and his education would have been learning, and indeed memorising, the Jewish scriptures, "*the Law and the prophets*" or *Torah* - what we call the OT.

*Luke gives us a brief insight when J was 12, left behind in Jerusalem.*

*J sitting among the teachers at the Temple listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers ... and just how much he had learnt by the time he was 12*

What is abundantly clear from *the gospels* is that the scriptures – our OT – were for Jesus the authoritative Word of God:

*Matthew 5: <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished*  
*John 10:35. "The Scripture cannot be broken"*

For Jesus his Bible was far more authoritative than any tradition - however ancient or well established *Matthew 15:<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"*

Right at the beginning of J's ministry when he was being tempted by Satan, how did he respond ?  
*It is written...It is written...It is written (Deut 6 – 8)*

When dealing with the people of His day, whether it was with the disciples or religious rulers, Jesus constantly referred to the Old Testament:

*"Have you not read that which was spoken to you by God?" (Matthew 22:31);* He quoted from it often and He trusted it totally.

**It is clear that the OT saturated and moulded the whole of Jesus' thinking.**

In the 4 gospels Jesus quotes from the OT between 70 and 100 times.

But quite apart from this He makes literally hundreds of *allusions* to the Old Testament, the odd phrase, this idea or that.

To give you one example in *Matt. 24:29-31* *Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Son of man coming in glory.*

*Just 3 verses...allusions to 7 different OT passages*

One writer describes J's quotes and allusions to the OT as *outcrops of his whole way of thinking. Like granite tors in Devon and Cornwall – lumps of granite = a tiny visible indication of the vast layers of granite which lie invisible below the surface*

For Jesus as a good Jew, the Old Testament was the *Torah - teaching or instruction* - the way God teaches us. And for Jesus that was not *as school teacher teaches his class but as a Father teaches his child* – the sharing of all that he knows and values and wants his son, his daughter to learn.  
*Think how Jesus learnt to be a carpenter from Joseph.*

So for Jesus his scriptures – our OT were the very words of God, his heavenly Father himself.

Think of what Jesus says to Satan when tempted by him in the wilderness

*'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* Jesus says that God's word is  
*something that is just as essential for us to live as bread is for the body.*

More than this, for Jesus his scriptures – our OT were (as the writer to the Hebrews puts it) something *living and active*. Think of *the Parable of the sower* – the word is described as a seed – something that grows, transforms, brings life.

**Jesus' whole thinking was moulded by the scriptures and his whole mission and destiny was directed by them.**

*e.g. in Luke 4* Jesus defines his whole mission as being the fulfilment of the prophecy in *Isaiah 61<sup>18</sup>* *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. etc & then he said*

*"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

*Luke 18: <sup>31</sup>Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.<sup>32</sup> He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. <sup>33</sup>On the third day he will rise again."*

The clearest indication of this is in *Luke 24* when the risen Jesus appeared first to the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus and then to the other disciples in the upper room: *"Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures"*

Now you might be thinking this is all very well with regard to the OT but **What about the NT ?** Just very briefly: J clearly saw his own words and teaching as being just as authoritative as OT scriptures:

1. Compare *Matthew 5: <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from **the Law** (i.e. the Old Testament) until everything is accomplished* with *Matthew 24 <sup>35</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but **my words** will never pass away.*
2. *Matthew 5: e.g. v. <sup>21</sup>"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, (again i.e. the Old Testament) <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment*
3. In the light of all this we would expect Jesus to make provision for there to be a divinely inspired and authoritative account of his life and teaching, just as there had been for the Patriarchs and the prophets in the OT. And this is exactly what we find:

The night before J dies he tells his disciples that he will be sending them the Holy Spirit *who will teach them all things and will remind them of everything He had said to them. He will guide you into all truth.*

And so Paul writes to Timothy as in our first reading: *you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed i.e. the inspired word of God*

**Does all this mean there is no room at all for church tradition?** (By tradition I mean not rituals etc. but the collective understanding of the church) Along with the Reformers, I believe that there is a place for tradition in the life of the church, because, Paul, Himself, speaks of the importance of tradition, the things that he "handed down." *2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.* So there is a place for the tradition of the church – its collective understanding - to help us understand Scripture, otherwise it would be a case of each individual being wise in his own eyes, which can lead to eccentric doctrines and strange sects. If you interpret a verse in a way that is contrary to how the church has consistently interpreted it down through the ages – guess who is more likely to be wrong! But *Scripture alone* means Scripture is the ultimate authority, not what I feel the Spirit is telling me, nor any tradition that has grown up in a church which then turns out to have no basis in Scripture.

If the scriptures, including Jesus' own words passed onto us in the New Testament were so important for Christ, the Son of God – if they had authority over all human traditions and human ideas, if they were so vital for life, his understanding of himself, his purpose in life, his relationship with his heavenly Father, then how can they be anything less for us ?

You cannot survive, or live or grow as a Christian without the Bible, so if you are not feeding on it daily, now is the time to start – or start again.