

Sermon Title: When "Alone" is Good – Reformation 2017 (1 of 3)

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Various

Date: 3-12-17

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Well, we have just finished First Peter, and that brings us to, "What next?" And I've been looking for the right timeslot where it would fit, and I decided that it is, right now. If you aren't aware of it, the year 2017 is the 500th Anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. It would do us well to understand some things about that. We need to understand who we are and what we believe. We're not a part of a denomination—that's okay, we're part of the Body of Christ (Eph. 5:29-30; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27). We don't recite a doctrinal creed every Sunday; many do, and that's okay, too—as long as the creed is Biblical.

We chose three words when we chose the name of this church. Now, the first one's pretty obvious: Church. I'm not crazy about naming churches things that don't have the word "church" in the name—it's like, "We're going to do a bait-and-switch; we're going to call ourselves something else, and then get you in and convince you that you're part of a church." We put the word "Bible" in front of it; boy, there's no problem with *that* one! It ought to be redundant, because there *is* no such thing as a church that is not committed to the Bible; anything else that they're committed to makes them a *non*-church. So, "Bible Church"—that's good. It's also not part of a denomination. There are many Bible Churches around the world; we have great fellowship and partnership with a number of Bible Churches.

But, you really need two adjectives to go in front of "Church." We are a church and we are a Bible-believing church, and we've called ourselves "Heritage Bible Church." I liked that when we chose it, and I like it even more as the years go by, because we need to understand: We have a great heritage. There's a great history. We are connected to something bigger than us, and something that's been going on a lot longer than we have been around. Most people don't know a whole lot about history, and especially the subcategory of "Church History." I don't want to shock you, but the actual truth is that, a lot went on between the Apostles and your grandma and grandpa, and it was really important stuff. And it's important that we know it, lest we think that we're inventing something. We're not! We've been called into something that Jesus Christ has been building since the events recorded in Acts Chapter 2 (Matt. 16:18).

So I'm going to devote three sermons—today is the first of them—on part of our heritage. Now, it would do you well to know what all led to the existence of the Roman Catholic Church, and how its doctrines and its hierarchy came to be what they are, and how they came to dominate the expression of Christianity for centuries. But I'm going to skip that—not because it isn't very important and worthwhile, but because we're going to focus on the Protestant Reformation. It is the largest movement of church history which has the most significant impact on who we are and what we are doing today.

So, let's start out with a little quiz. This is not a graduate-level quiz; this is more like a Reformation kindergarten-level quiz. But let's just see if you know what happened. First Question: Which were part of the Protestant Reformation? Was it: A battle over Communion, a battle over salvation, a battle over semantics, or a battle over politics? Well, this one has two correct answers: It was a battle over Communion—or, over the "Eucharist" or "The Lord's Supper" or the "Mass"—but mainly, it was a battle over salvation. Now, there were lots of semantics involved, to be sure; and, yes, sometimes it even got political, but the battle was over the definition of salvation.

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Now, in what century did the Reformation begin? Well, I've already given this one away, but think it through. Did it happen in the first century, the eleventh century, the sixteenth century, or the seventeenth century? The right answer is: the sixteenth century. The key event that touched it all off happened on October 31st, 1517, when Martin Luther took going door-to-door on Halloween to a whole new level. Well...I don't think that's exactly what happened, but it did happen to be Halloween.

In what country did the Reformation begin? Israel, Austria, Switzerland, or Germany? The right answer is: Germany; it was in the city of Wittenberg that Luther nailed his of document to the door of the church building.

Alright, here's a negative question: Which one of these was *not* a major influence in the Reformation? Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Martin Luther, or Jonathan Edwards? The right answer is: Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards was *thoroughly* committed to the doctrines of the Reformation, but he was an American pastor and evangelist who played a key role in the First Great Awakening in America in 1733 to '35; so he was a long time—more than 200 years—*after* the Protestant Reformation.

You know that the man who did the thing that touched off the Reformation was named Martin Luther. What was Martin Luther's profession? Was he a Roman Catholic monk, was he the leader of the Lutheran church, was he a carpenter, or was he a philosopher? Well, Martin Luther never joined a Lutheran church; it didn't happen until later. Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk. His intention was to deal *within* the Roman Catholic Church to address some things.

Well, what was it that touched off the Reformation? Was it Five Pillars, 95 Theses, Four Spiritual Laws, or 40 Days of Purpose? Well, the "Five Pillars" belong to Islam; the Four Spiritual Laws belong to Campus Crusade for Christ; "40 Days of Purpose" is a *total* fabrication of twisting Scripture. It was 95 Theses that he nailed the door of the Roman Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

So that makes this the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, and it is a great time to learn about your heritage. Now, we summarize it with the term "95 Theses," but the document that Luther nailed to the door of the church is also titled: "Disputation on the Power of Indulgences"—"95 Theses, or, Disputation of the Power of Indulgences." He was seeking to address the issue of corruption among the Roman Catholic priesthood, and *especially* over the sale of "indulgences." Now, we're not talking about potluck dinners at church; we're talking about something different. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that, even though sin is forgiven, you still must pay temporal punishment. If you weren't raised in a Catholic background, if you're not familiar with it, maybe you've seen it on television or in a movie, where they'll portray someone going and confessing to the priest—that's another whole subject on its own—but besides that, then you have to pay your temporal punishment; the priest will declare your sins absolved, but then you have to go do some act of "penance." Typically, it will involve reciting certain ritual things over and over again, or something like that—it can be more serious than that.

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Well, "indulgences" are a means to *buy your way out of* that temporal punishment. Here's an excerpt from a book on church history: "In the Roman Catholic Church, 'indulgence' is the remission of all or part of the debt of temporal punishment owed to God due to sin after the guilt has been forgiven. This grant is based on the principle of vicarious satisfaction; which means that, since the sinner is unable to do sufficient penance to expiate all his sins, he is able to draw upon the spiritual treasury formed by the surplus merits of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints."

So that's saying: Christ *didn't* do it all—you *also* have to do something, *and* you probably don't have enough gas in the tank to be able to do that. The *good* news is: Jesus had *excess* merit, so they put the excess merit of Christ into this big vat. The Virgin Mary added to it. Other saints have added to it since then, and you can draw upon that and, *for a price*, you can get a bigger dipper to draw out of the treasury of merit; you can pay to get out of the consequences of your sins that remain after the guilt has been removed.

Now, the concept of indulgences is *flagrantly* contradictory to the Bible (e.g. Heb. 10:14). So is the concept of "vicarious satisfaction." Christ satisfied the wrath of God *for* us, but that's a whole different thing that they're talking about. That's why Luther was so adamant about the need for the Pope to address corruption in the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. Selling indulgences, all you need to do is just have enough people with a guilty enough conscience and you can have a pretty effective fundraising campaign for the next thing that you want for your church to do. Luther was a Roman Catholic priest—he happened to be a monk—and he's the one who said, "This must be addressed because it is corrupt, and it's contrary to the Bible."

Now, there were others who followed in the footsteps of Luther, who helped hammer out this restoration of the truth of salvation. Here are a few other names that you might run across now and again: Philip Melanchthon was a collaborator with Luther. He was considered to be the first systematic theologian—that is, the one who started writing down the theology of the Protestant Reformation. He was considered by many to be the intellectual leader of the Lutheran branch of the Reformation; in contrast to Luther himself, who was more like the public cutting-edge figure. So maybe Luther talked more and Melanchthon wrote more; maybe you would be able to say that.

I introduced this name to you a little while ago: Ulrich Zwingli—you might have thought he was a golfer on the European Tour, but that's not true. He was the best-known Reformer in Switzerland. In 1522—that's five years after Luther touched everything off—in 1522, Zwingli caused his first public controversy when he attacked the concept of needing to fast during Lent. "Lent" is the 40 days leading up to Easter; the Roman Catholic Church has attached all kinds of mystical and symbolic meaning to that time. It is *totally* foreign to the Bible. It begins with "Ash Wednesday," which is when they put ashes on the forehead to symbolize repentance. Repentance is a perfectly good thing—I'm not at all against repentance—but the Roman Catholic idea has the idea that this is *meritorious* to do this kind of thing, and to give up something for Lent; that used to be a fast of certain kinds of foods. We happen to be in the period of Lent right now.

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I just watched a video the other day of a church in our area—this is a Protestant church—doing an Ash Wednesday service to kick off Lent. What a *profoundly* awful idea! "Let's celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation by blurring the lines!" That's a really, really, *really* bad idea!

And by the way—do you know where "Mardi Gras" comes from? "Mardi" is the French word for Tuesday; "Gras" is the French word for "grand" or "fat"—it's called "Fat Tuesday" if you translate it. What's that? That's where you go out and commit all your debauchery the day before you have to start giving up stuff to help earn your salvation! [Light laughter] It *is* okay if you giggle, but there are big, big, *big* issues here!

Another key name: John Knox; he was the leader of the Reformation in Scotland. He, too—like Luther—tried to reform things within the Roman Catholic Church. That got him into being a prisoner in France, then he was exiled to England. So, Scotland to France back to England. When Mary Tudor came to the throne and became the Queen of England, she reestablished Roman Catholicism as the religion of the land, and Knox was forced to resign the position that he had then, in a church in England, and he had to flee. So he went from Scotland to France to England, then he got run out of town there; he wound up spending time in Geneva with John Calvin—whom I'll talk about in a moment—and then, he eventually returned to Scotland and lit the fires of the Protestant Reformation. It's John Knox who is considered to be the founder of the Presbyterian Church from Scotland, and there are spiritual descendants of that branch of the Reformation nearby us today.

John Calvin is probably the best-known Reformer, other than Martin Luther—at least by name he has the most recognition; his name is well-known. Many people know a very abbreviated *caricature* of the doctrines that John Calvin is associated with. Calvin broke from the Roman Catholic Church in his native France in 1530, so he came along 13 years after the start of the Reformation. There was widespread violence against Protestant Christians that erupted in France, and he fled to Basel, Switzerland. From there, he published a famous book called: "Institutes of the Christian Religion." It was, basically, his systematic theology book; he published that in 1536.

A Frenchman by the name of William Farel then recruited Calvin to come to Geneva, Switzerland, where Calvin began a very extensive preaching ministry. Eventually, the city leaders in Geneva expelled Calvin and Farel, thinking they were acting in the best interest of their city. That got Calvin to Strasburg, where he spent his time ministering to French refugees...Hmm, wonder why he was interested in that? And then he was eventually invited *back* to Geneva—they invited Calvin and Farel to come back; Calvin picked up at the next passage where he had left off preaching in the book that he was preaching in when he got one out of town. Calvin eventually preached through nearly every book of the Bible, and wrote commentaries on nearly every book of the Bible. He is probably the beginning of the concept of expository preaching in the modern era, or at least in the Protestant era.

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Do you get the picture? These doctrines, that we are so familiar with from the Bible, were the basis for many very severe battles of conscience and the pen; and sometimes, it was to the point of bloodshed. I mentioned Mary the First—Mary Tudor. She became the Queen of England in 1553, and she reigned a whopping five years. Mary Tudor was Roman Catholic; she's the one who earned her nickname: "Bloody Mary." You know why? It was for killing Christians, for murdering Protestants. During her five-year reign, she had more than 280 Protestants—she called them "Religious Dissidents"—burned at the stake.

This is serious stuff. It all began October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed "95 Theses Upon Indulgences" to the door of the church. He made many solid theological points. I've read through the 95 Theses; his essential message was that the basis of forgiveness is repentance, and good works are the *evidence* of a person's forgiveness, not the *basis* for a person's forgiveness (see Eph. 2:8-10). So it was all the work accomplished by Christ; we repent and come empty-handed to the Cross (see Rom. 3:10-26).

Now, remember: when he posted the 95 Theses, Luther was seeking to reform corruption *within* the Roman Catholic Church. Luther *did not* make any threats: "Come around, or I'm going to leave!" He didn't mount a rebellion; that was *farthest* from his mind! It was not Luther who split; it was the *response* of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church—all the way to the Pope—it was their response that made it clear: "You *may not* question us! We are the authority (cf. Matt. 23:2)! The traditions of the Church will stand; they are *not* subject to review—especially by some comeuppance of a priest in Wittenberg, Germany, who thinks he has the audacity to compare what we say to the Bible!" It was the response of the *Catholic Church* that caused the great schism that we know of as the Protestant Reformation.

Soon the debate spilled over into more significant things. Mainly, the most significant one being: the definition of justification—what does it take to be declared righteous before God? Most believe that it was Luther's study of the Book of Romans, and his work in writing a commentary on the book of Galatians, that cemented his understanding of what the Scriptures teach. That's a very good place to go! Romans and Galatians are essential to the gospel. I have read that, in Luther's own testimony, it was his study of the Psalms where he actually came personally to repentance and faith in Christ.

So the Reformation rather quickly became an epic battle for the truth of the gospel and the very definition of salvation. I say all that because, we need to learn from the battles of the past. The Church is, in First Timothy 3:15, called "the pillar and support of the truth" (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). So we had better know what the essential truths are that we are expected by God to support and to stand upon.

I have a two-point outline that will last us three weeks. I already slipped in Number 1 on you: "Do you know what happened?" There was a great big rift when someone challenged the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, based upon what the Bible actually teaches. That leads to: Five principles to stand upon. There are five categories of doctrine, if you will, that been associated with the Protestant Reformation. Now, we want to sound really scholarly, and we want to sound really hyper-spiritual, so we learn them in Latin.

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They are: *Sola Scriptura*, which means "Scripture Alone"—we're saying Scripture *alone* is the authority, nothing else. *Sola Fide*—we're saying "Faith Alone," you come to Christ by faith plus nothing. *Sola Gratia*—it is by "Grace Alone" that you are saved, not grace plus works or anything else. *Solus Christus*—it is by "Christ Alone" that you are saved. And finally: *Soli Deo Gloria*—"Glory to God Alone." Salvation is not all about *you* feeling good. Oh, it's really good to be saved, but it is for the glory of God. This whole thing about Christ and Him redeeming the people that God has chosen to redeem—that is for the glory of God (see Ps. 79:9; Is. 46:13; Jn. 17:1-2; Rom. 1:5; 1 Jn. 2:12; Rev. 5:9, 12; 7:9-12; 19:1).

So we want to learn from the Bible the significance of those five things, and what they mean in practice for you and me 500 years later. Today we're going to get to the first one: *Sola Scriptura*—Scripture Alone. Now the issue here is the matter of ultimate authority. That is maybe even the fundamental difference between Catholic and Protestant; because, if you get *this one* wrong, you don't have a way of deciding the others. The Roman Catholic Church holds to the view that the hierarchy of the Church—that's the priests, the bishops, the cardinals, the college of cardinals, all the way up to the Pope; and it's definitely a pyramid-shaped organizational structure—they hold the view that the hierarchy of the Church is the only truly qualified interpreter of Scripture, and that the Church can make proclamations of equal authority to the Scriptures.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that, when the Pope speaks—and I bet you've heard this word—*ex cathedra*, it is very special. *Ex cathedra* literally means "from the chair"; when he is sitting in the chair that is believed to be the seat of Christ on Earth—that's what they think about the Pope—he is declaring truth as the successor of Peter, whom they believe Jesus installed as the first Pope, and his words concerning faith and morals have the same infallible character as the words of the Apostles in the Scriptures.

Now, if the Pope happens to be having breakfast and says, "Pass the butter," that doesn't change anything in the doctrine of the Catholic Church; but when he speaks "from the seat"—when he speaks *ex cathedra*—that is of the same authority as the Scripture. *And*, did you notice, if the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy is the only qualified interpreter of the Scriptures, Scripture means, not what it *says*—it means what the Catholic Church *tells you* that it means by what it says. Massive, massive issue!

Now, it's interesting: the doctrine of *ex cathedra* was not formally confirmed by the Roman Catholic Church until the First Vatican Council—which was one of their church council's—in 1869 to 1870. *But*, that's when they confirmed it; it *was* the practice of the church for centuries before that, and clearly, it was their belief in 1517, because no little upstart priest from Wittenberg, Germany *dare* say, "But the Bible says...!"

So here's the issue: The Roman Catholic Church view is that the Church sits in authority over the Bible; whereas the Bible teaches that we are all *under* the authority of the Scriptures (see Is. 8:20; cf. Mk. 7:9). That's true individually for every single one of us as children of God; it is true collectively for us as a church. As a flock, the Scriptures are our authority (see 2 Pet. 3:2; cf. Prov. 30:5-6).

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So what exactly do we mean by *Sola Scriptura*? We say that the Bible is the only authority on all things to do with spiritual life and practice. Here's a statement of the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* from history; it comes in one of those "We affirm and we deny" formats. Here's the definition: "We affirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience." Now, I'll stop there for second, because you'll read about that when you hear Luther; Luther talked about, "My conscience will be bound only by the Word of God, so you can't tell me contrary to what God has said in His Word" (Matt. 15:9).

[Back to the definition]: "The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin, and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured. We deny, that any creed, council, or individual may bind a Christian's conscience; that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of, or contrary to, what is set forth in the Bible; or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation." *Sola Scriptura* means: the Bible is the complete, finished, written, *sole* Word of God. Anything else is *under* the authority of the Bible (Is. 8:20). So the crucial truth that is wrapped up in *Sola Scriptura*, or Scripture Alone, is that the Bible is your spiritual authority (Ps. 119:1-4), and it's also your spiritual food (Matt. 4:4).

Now, God does place people in the body of Christ—and I'm doing something like that right now—to maybe *help* you with understanding and applying God's Word, to maybe *help* you learn how to feed yourself from of the Word of God; but don't buy anything that a church or any human says, unless and until you verify that it agrees with the Bible (Acts 17:11). If somebody tells you that this is a sound doctrine, you'd *better* be able to find it in the Bible. If I were to tell you that you can avoid eternal punishment, or that you can avoid the chastening of God in this life, by paying me a big fat tip or a special offering to Heritage Bible Church to proclaim you absolved—if you ever hear that come from here, run me out of here immediately! That's blasphemy! If I ever tell you that there are rituals and sacraments or ceremonies beyond the two that are in the Bible—Communion and Baptism—if I tell you there are any of those things that you need to do in order to be saved, run me out of here immediately. If I ever tell you that even *those* can get you saved, *run me out of here immediately!* When you come to the Lord's Table, that's not when you *receive* Christ, as is said in the Mass. You receive Christ by grace through faith alone—nothing more. We'll get to the grace and faith alone later. The Bible contains everything you need for every doctrine, and it contains everything you need to be equipped for every single good work that God wants to do through you.

Alright—shall we open our Bibles once today? Second Timothy Chapter 3, Verses 16 and 17. You can't pick a passage more germane to *Sola Scriptura* than this: "All Scripture is inspired by God"—literally, it is "God-breathed"—"and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." So that means that the Bible teaches you—it lays out the teaching or the doctrine (cf. Ps. 19:7-9). It reproofs you—that's how the Holy Spirit works to take the Bible and compare it to your behavior and show you where you're off-track; that's reproof (Ps. 19:11). The Bible is what God uses for correction—when the Holy Spirit teaches you how to correct your behavior to get back to being in line with the teaching (Ps. 119:9). And the result of teaching, reproof, and correction is "training in righteousness" (cf. Heb. 5:14). And then Verse 17 says: "So that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." It is Scripture alone which equips you for every good work (Ps. 119:98-105; Titus 1:9).

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Now, we need to make sure that you take this from the theoretical doctrinal dusty cubbyholes in your mind and get it into practical application. Yes, we are 500 years removed from the start of the Protestant Reformation, but we need to just as diligently and rigorously stand for the truth of *Sola Scriptura*. It is under attack today as seriously as ever before. The evangelical church in America, in general, has *lost* its commitment to Scripture! There *are* denominations that actually have their own Latin phrase; they don't say *Sola Scriptura*, they say *Prima Scriptura*, meaning: the *primacy* of Scripture; meaning that they believe the Bible is really important, it's really good, it's really helpful—but it's not all there is! It's the best source, it's the most important one—but then there are your own inner voices, there are traditions, there are symbols, there are rituals, there are ceremonies; and *all* of them teach us things as well. Well, you can learn things by example, and see them in symbolism and all of that; but, you bring *every bit of that* under the authority of the Scripture, and you *reject* anything that is not *squarely* in line with Scripture (Is. 8:20). So we don't preach *Prima Scriptura*.

We have flung the door wide open to a whole bunch of other things. We say, for example, "Well, the Bible is okay for so-called *spiritual* things, but if you have a really tough problem, you probably need some meditation or some psychotherapy or something like that." Now, psychology is one of those words that's been hijacked. What a great word! The Greek word for soul is *psuchē*, or "psyche"; and the "ology" comes from the Greek word for "word," or, "the word about"—Psychology at its root means: "the word about the soul." But psychology in *our* world is a mutually-exclusive false religion compared to the Bible. Because you go to the world of psychology, it'll tell you, "Everybody's basically good." *GONG*—That's not true! You can't *fix* the problem of your soul until you *diagnose* the problem of your soul, which is, that it is fallen away from God (Rom. 8:7)! Your eyes are blinded apart from Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). It is from "the heart" that come all of these "evil thoughts" and "fornications" and "adulteries" (Matt. 15:19) and wickedness and every evil word and every evil deed (see Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9)!

*Sola Scriptura*. The Bible is not just helpful for minor issues; it has—according to Second Peter Chapter 1, Verse 3—"everything pertaining to life and godliness." Everything you need to have spiritual life, everything you need to live your life out in a godly way for the glory of God, is already "once for all handed down" to you in the Bible (Jude 3). If you *don't believe that*, you are out of step with true Christianity! That's *at the core* of what we believe! Scripture is the sole authority (Matt. 24:35; Jn. 8:51; 14:23-24; cf. 1 Cor. 16:22).

Truth is *never* determined by experience! We have experiences every day, but we have to take our experiences and bring them under the microscope of the Word of God (Ps. 119:24). Like I said last week: God speaks to you through His Word; He does not speak through audible voices. Your inner impressions are not revelation from God. Your instincts are not revelation from God. Now, with practice, with experience, you may have some good intuition—but it all comes down to being under the authority of the Scriptures!

Jude Verse 3 describes it as "the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." Or, as we saw at the end of First Peter last week: you resist the devil, standing firm in "the faith" (NKJV)—*the doctrine* taught by *the Word* of God. God is not giving new revelation today; no one is having experiences today which change or add to the Word of God.



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If we *are* the Church which Jesus Christ is building, which He began on the day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts Chapter 2—then we will be built upon the Word of God (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20), and we will do what it tells us to do (Lk. 11:28; Rev. 14:12). We will be diligent to proclaim the Word (Ezra 7:10; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2). We will be diligent to submit ourselves to it rigorously (Ps. 119:4; Titus 2:14); and when God gives us the insight to see that something that we're doing is not fully under the authority of the Word, we want to trim it away, by His grace and by His goodness (Ps. 119:59-60; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:9-11; 2:12-13; Heb. 13:20-21).

Toward the end of his life, Paul sent young Pastor Timothy to Ephesus, and he dropped him off there and he left him to lead that church, and he left him there to straighten out some false teachers who had come down. They were they were bringing things into the church which would probably, in our world, be brought under the category of "new and exciting"; they were speculating about things. And what Paul said to Timothy when he wrote to him in First Timothy, Verses 14 and 15 of Chapter 3—he says, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." If Heritage Bible is not "the pillar the support of the truth," which is God's Word (Jn. 17:17), then we are *not* a church—we are not "the church of the living God."

That's why I harangue you so often on: Get yourself the best translation of the Bible that you can find. Get yourself a good Study Bible that is produced by people with a great understanding and reverence for God's Word, and then—wear it out! Read it! Learn it! Verse by verse, page by page, chapter by chapter, book by book—put it all together. If you run across things that are difficult, ask questions! Please don't ever think that I'm going to even come *close* to getting tired of being asked Bible questions! No joy greater in the world than to bring someone under the authority of Scripture!

Now, I thought we lost all of our time last night with the switch to Daylight Savings Time, but somebody sped up the clocks again here. Stay with me for a minute; this will be worthwhile. Let me give you a gem to ponder. This is from D.A. Carson—a book: "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology." You read your Bible, and maybe not everything immediately seems to fit; you *do* have questions. He wrote this, and it's very, very good. Let me just read it to you:

"I am not saying that the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle of 5,000 pieces and that all 5,000 pieces are provided so that, with time and thought, the entire picture can be completed. Rather, I am suggesting that the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle that provides 5,000 pieces, along with the assurance that these pieces all belong to the same puzzle, even though 95,000 pieces are missing. Most of the pieces that are provided, the instructions insist, fit together rather nicely; but there are gaping holes, a lot of edges that cry out to be completed, with some clusters of pieces that seem to be on their own. Nevertheless, the assurance that all the pieces do belong to one puzzle is helpful, for that makes it possible to develop systematic theology; even though systematic theology is not going to be completed until we receive more pieces from the One who made it"—and he doesn't mean more books of the Bible; he means, "Until you're with the Lord" (see 1 Cor. 13:12).

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Scripture Text: Various

Date: 3-12-17

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He goes on to say: "And meanwhile, even some systematicians who believe that all the pieces belong to the same puzzle are not very adept puzzle-players, but sometimes they force pieces into slots where they don't really belong; the picture gets distorted somewhat, but it remains, basically, recognizable." In other words, the Bible contains *all the pieces we need*—all that we are supposed to have (Deut. 29:29)—for everything concerning "life and godliness." Now, don't worship the Bible—that's not what *Sola Scriptura* means—but let it lead you to know and to worship and to enjoy forever, the gracious God who gave it to you (Jn. 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:15).

Now, one final thing and we're done. The Protestant Reformation was a *really* big deal. It was *huge!* It changed the directions of *countries!* Western civilization rests on the shoulders of the implications of the Protestant Reformation. Well, the Catholic Church didn't just say, "Get out of here! Don't let the door hit you on the way out. Good riddance! Glad to be rid of you guys, and now we're back to business as usual." They responded. The Council of Trent was a series of meetings of Catholic bishops to respond to the Reformers. Now, you don't just have everybody go to their computer and log on, and then download "GoToMeeting.com," and you all have a meeting one day. This was a series of meetings from 1545 to 1563—it took them 18 years to meet a whole bunch of times and hammer all of this out. Those bishops produced the official Roman Catholic positions on the crucial doctrines that we call the "Five Solas," and many sub-points as well. And remember, I told you—Luther didn't lead a rebellion; Luther sought to reform his precious, beloved church. It was their *reaction* that caused the schism.

What did they happen to say about *Sola Scriptura*? Well, there is a group of books called the "Apocrypha." They were written between about 300 BC and 30 BC, so in the era between Old Testament and New Testament. They are Jewish books. They're *interesting*, but they're not inspired; they contain a number of things contrary to what the Bible teaches elsewhere. Well, many of the doctrines that are unique to Roman Catholicism—such as the teachings of Purgatory, that's where you finish purging the chastisement for your sins; prayers for the dead; salvation by works—those don't come from the Old Testament, those don't come from the New Testament; those come from the Apocrypha. The Roman Catholic Church *includes* the Apocrypha; if you've ever seen a Roman Catholic Bible, it has more than 66 books—it's got that group between Old Testament and New Testament.

In *Sola Scriptura*, the Reformers rejected the Apocrypha as part of the Biblical canon. It was during the fourth session of the Council of Trent that the Catholic Church issued a decree *damning* anyone who rejects the Apocrypha! Their exact words—they said: "If any one receive not as sacred and canonical"—in other words, holy and part of the Bible—"if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition"—that was done by Jerome in about the fifth century—"and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema." You know what "anathema" means? "Accursed"—*straight to hell without any hope at all* (see Matt. 25:41; Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8-9)! If you believe that you hold in your hand the completed Word of God, it's the Roman Catholic Church that says you and your doctrine are accursed (contra Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5; Rev. 22:18). This was a big deal, my friends—a *great big deal!* So, the position of the Roman Catholic Church: You're accursed.

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That's one point. I have four more, and the other four are equally under attack, just as much as they were 500 years ago when these things were first articulated.

Do you know what happened? The Reformation. Five principles: *Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria.*

Let's pray:

*Heavenly Father, thank You for those who have gone before us in these spiritual battles. Thank You, most of all, for Your Word, and how it reveals to us Your character and Your Son, and all that You have done for our redemption. Thank You, Father, that we can stand on Scripture alone. Have Your way with us. Bring us into obedience to Your Word, wherever we may not be, in Jesus' name. Amen.*