

VISION FORWARD



THE WORD OF GOD | SOLA SCRIPTURA

But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4

Pastor Bill took us through the Five Solas of the Reformation this past weekend. God has chosen to record and reveal the story of His work of creation and the redemption of all creation in a collection of 66 books written by 44 authors. This collection was written over thousands of years and tells a cohesive story. We call this collection of books the Bible. Without this divinely revealed truth we as a people are lost in uncharted territory. In antiquity, Roman cartographers would write, "HIC SUNT LEONES" or "here are lions" at the edge of their maps of the known world. Gradually that practice was replaced in the middle ages by images of dragons or the text, "HIC SUNT DRACONES"; At the end of the world off the edge of the map, "there be dragons". In this month's Vision Forward we'll look at a few of the dragons lurking in the unknown when our map of revelation is

rejected and Scripture is viewed as just another dusty book from the ancient past.

THE BLUEPRINT OF EXISTENCE

The naturalist philosophy of our age tells us that the existence of existence is no more than the flip of a coin. A long time ago there was nothing. Then somehow that nothingness became a mysterious unknowable thing called a singularity. Through quantum fluctuation that singularity went BLAMMO and we've got a hot mess of a universe. Through many more improbable events including biological life from inert rocks and gas, personality and intelligence springing up from impersonal and unthinking hot matter soup, and we get to life as we know it today. Everything that's ever existed, that exists now, and will exist has no purpose or meaning beyond what we choose to assign it. Eventually due to entropy all of the universe will wind down to an end. So whatever purpose and meaning we have happened to assign to this accidental existence will perish along with us and with it. All in all, at a point in the distant future we're back at endless nothingness or perhaps a new hot mess soup,

depending on who you ask. No meaning. No purpose. A nihilistic mystery indeed.

Thankfully, that isn't the case. The Bible is our key for understanding the mystery of existence and it tells a different story.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

Paul writes to us in the New Testament:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2

Cosmologically speaking the first point of transformation is that instead of a meaningless origin of chance and nothingness, there is in fact something. That originating something, in point of fact, is God. A God with personality and intelligence who demonstrated infinite creativity and power by speaking reality into existence. Instead of humans as randomly animated matter with no direction we find that God, the creator of all things, has defined what sort of beings we are, what sort of activities and work we are to do, and how we are to conduct ourselves as we venture out into this thing called life. *Thanks to the revelation that God has given us in Scripture we have an origin, an identity, a purpose, and a destiny.*

LIFE IS A SPIRITUAL BATTLEGROUND

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:12

"and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Ephesians 6:17

This world is full of conflict and strife between individuals, families, political parties and nations. Behind these conflicts is a war of a different realm. A war of two kingdoms in the spiritual realm that spills over and influences all that transpires on the earth. We are called to fight this spiritual battle and one of our primary weapons, as the Apostle Paul writes, *"is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."*

Pastor Bill told us on Sunday when Jesus was tempted and tested in the wilderness his weapon was not witty retorts or ridicule. He didn't use his fists. He unsheathed the sword of the Word. If that was how our Lord Jesus responded that is how we must respond. Notice too, the enemy of our souls attempted to warp and twist the Word of God to suit his deception.

This strategy is still in the playbook. In the Screwtape letters, C.S. Lewis writes from the diabolical perspective of two demons trying to keep a man from becoming a Christian and later attempting to drive him from his faith in Christ. They plan to use a twisting of Scripture to do this. At one point Screwtape gives advice on the usefulness of constructing different and competing versions of an "historical Jesus" in order to confuse and deceive the Christian.

SCREWTAPE: Each historical Jesus is unhistorical! The ghostly documents called the Bible say what they say and cannot be added to.

WORMWOOD: If that's the case, then how do you create new versions of the historical Jesus?

SCREWTAPE: By suppressing one point of Jesus teaching and exaggerating another. That single emphasis takes what he taught completely out of context and distorts the rest. What is left is subjective guesswork that inevitably caters to the humans own predispositions and political views. All such constructions place this historical Jesus in some peculiar theory he was supposed to have promulgated. Thus we distract humans from who Jesus actually was and what he actually did.

We're in a battle and we must recognize that fact. We must know the ground that is being contested and the reasons why we're in the fight. Spiritual battles will always involve distorting or contesting what God has said and commanded. It began in the garden of Eden and it continues today. Anyone can quote the Bible. As I mentioned above in the book of Matthew Satan quotes the Bible. There are many who would try and lead people from God's truth. Some out of ignorance or confusion and some from outright malice. The only way to spot a counterfeit is to deeply know the authentic or true article. To recognize these false depictions of Jesus for the counterfeits that they are we must truly and deeply know Him. We know Him by fellowship, by prayer, and by studying His Word.

ORIENTATION AND EVALUATION

"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." 2 Timothy 3:16

Driving in a blizzard can be a stressful experience. Making out the other cars on the road is difficult. Soon even the road itself starts to disappear and all you can see is snow. Now, Imagine traveling at 600 miles an hour and not being able to see anything at all! Pilots often fly in conditions with zero visibility. They can't always use their eyes to guide them. Flying at night and traversing through heavy clouds requires more than sight to navigate. Likewise, navigating through this life requires an

understanding that there is more to this world than what can be seen with natural eyes. To ensure we aren't lost we need a guidance system. We need a trustworthy navigator. God's Word is our divine compass and coordinate system by which we can see where we are and where we are going. Without a firm grasp of God's Word we're navigating without the map. But how do we know we have the right map? How do we know we can trust God's Word? You might have friends or family who tell you, "The Bible has been translated so many times there is no way to know what it really said." Or know people that claim Constantine created the New Testament Canon or created the doctrines of the early church. Neither of those statements are true. I encourage you to dig deep into any claims made against the veracity of Scripture. Find out where they really came from and test those claims against the best scholarship. The field of archeology continues to unearth older and older manuscripts of both the Old and New testament. There are thousands of manuscripts in Greek and Latin which we can reference. We can read the original languages of manuscripts and letters. The early Christians knew their Scriptures well and they quoted it frequently in their letters. According to Doctor Daniel B. Wallace, professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, we have "nearly the entire New Testament independently recorded in quotations from early church writings".

Our lives are full of complicated questions and difficult choices. How do we know the right course of action? How can we be clear headed when our emotions clamor and rock us from within? How can we find the way forward when the once clear roadways into our future have melded with the flurry of the storm and we have no vision? In order to have clarity and discernment into the deep ethical and moral dilemmas in our lives we need to know our origin, our purpose, and our destiny. We need to know what the Word of God says and we need to know it well. The Word must be hidden in our hearts and readily deployable. Like a chisel or a saw, it must be kept sharp and free of rust. God's Word is the most powerful weapon for disciples to overcome deceptions, temptations, and fear. So how do we hide the Word in our hearts? By study, memorization, and meditation on the Scriptures. By not shying away from the difficult sayings of Scripture, but honestly asking questions and searching for insight and solid teaching to unpack those passages we don't understand.

How do we keep it readily deployable? By praying God's Words and truth over one another and over our lives constantly. But we can't do that in a vacuum. Sola Scriptura doesn't mean that each of us is an independent and equal interpreter. We need the regeneration of the Holy Spirit and fellowship with one another. We need to hear the preaching of the Gospel on a regular basis to soften our hearts and keep Jesus before our eyes. We need diligent biblical teaching that builds our understanding of God's truth. We need the divine

revelation that God through the minds of His chosen authors created and preserved for us. We need the Holy Scriptures.

SEPTEMBER PRAYER TARGETS

- 1) **Pray against fear** - Anxiousness and depression abound. I'm sure some of you reading this right now are in that battle. You are not alone. Jesus sees you and loves you with an unstoppable love. Elim Grace, let us be willing to be honest about our emotions with each other. Let's lift our brothers and sisters up in prayer for freedom from anxiousness and fear.
- 2) **For the Godly leaders of our nation to be encouraged and steadfast.** For scales to fall off the eyes of those leaders that are blind to the truth of the gospel and who would seek to hinder or harass the Kingdom of God
- 3) **Unity - Our 2020 Vision Statement is to be 'a united church uniting people'** We aren't a people united by our ethnicity, our history, or any other earthly category. Our Unity is supernatural in origin. We are born from above, dead to sin and trespasses and alive in Christ. Our community and loving unity should make those in the world scratch their heads. Let's pray that our unity will inspire people to want to know why we are united, why we have hope, and lead them to follow Jesus.