

Sola Scriptura

Part 4 of 4 – Efficacy

In the third article of this series, we discussed how the doctrines of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture are essential to our understanding and belief that the Bible is the most authoritative source for every aspect of living. In this fourth and final article of the series on the doctrine of Scripture alone (“sola scriptura”), we will examine the efficacy or power of Scripture to produce faith, obedience and transformation in the lives of believers and unbelievers alike.

WE BELIEVE in the efficacy of the Bible

The efficacy of Scripture simply means the transforming power of God’s Word. In other words, Scripture is a tool used by the Holy Spirit to transform people’s lives. Therefore, the Bible is not merely words on paper, but rather, it is alive and the power of the Holy Spirit is inherent in its pages. That’s what the writer of Hebrews was referring to when he wrote, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). The author of Hebrews tells his audience that the Word of God is so powerful that it can penetrate to the depths of our being, body and soul, and it exposes the true thoughts, beliefs and intentions of the heart. The inner attitude of the hearer will be revealed according to how a person responds to the Word of God.

The apostle Paul also points to the power of God’s Word in his first letter to the Thessalonians: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (2:13). The Word of God is powerful and effective in the sense that “it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:10–11).

That’s the incredible nature of the Word of God: its power or efficacy is always intrinsically inherent in it due to its divine inspiration. It isn’t dependent on someone believing it or accepting it to be effective or powerful – it is the very words and will of God, and therefore contains the power of the Spirit in its pages. For the Word of God, as such, cannot even be imagined apart from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, because these two entities are inseparable as part of the Triune Godhead. Scripture possesses and retains its internal power and efficacy even when not used, just as the illuminating power of the sun continues, even though clouds or the rotation of the earth may prevent someone from seeing it; and just as an internal efficacy belongs to the seed, although it may not be sown in the field.

The effectiveness of God’s Word

The Holy Spirit uses Scripture to accomplish a variety of results. The first result is it produces faith – “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). When we hear or read the Bible, it is able to produce faith in us.

Secondly, Scripture was written so “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). Paul says that “the holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). We are “born

again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23). The Word of God (literally and figuratively, referring to Christ) was given to save sinners.

Third, God’s Word is the key to our spiritual growth – “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2), but “every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age” (Heb. 5:13-14). We begin with the milk of the Word as newborn babes in Christ, and we move on to the meat of the Word as we grow spiritually.

Fourth, Scripture has the power to overcome Satan. When Jesus Christ was tempted for forty days, He repeatedly used the Scriptures to overcome Satan (Matt. 4:1-11). And John says that the Word of God that abides within us enables us to overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14).

Fifth, the Holy Spirit uses Scripture to sanctify believers. In John 17:17, Jesus prays to the Father, asking Him to “sanctify us through thy truth: thy word is truth.” The psalmist David was asked a question, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” to which he replies, “by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Ps. 119:9). In fact, 163 of the 165 verses in Psalm 119 speak about the efficacy of God’s Word. Throughout the New Testament and in lives today, we see the transforming power of Scripture in those who “believed, and confessed, and shewed their deeds ... so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (Acts 19:20).

Such are the many benefits of Scripture. But it must be properly received in order to be effective in transforming and empowering one’s life: it must be received in faith (Heb. 4:2); it must be received with meekness (James 1:21); it must be obeyed and lived out, not just heard (James 1:22-25); it must be fervently desired (Ps. 1:1-3); and it must abide within us if we are not to sin against God (Ps. 119:11). When we receive and believe in the Bible, as it is in truth, the Word of God, its intrinsic power and efficacy is able to effectually work in us. May we learn to cherish and treasure it more than gold, yea, than much fine gold, for when we heed, follow and obey its teachings, principles and doctrine, there is great reward (Ps. 19:10-11). As we conclude this series, it is my hope and prayer that we can all boldly affirm the doctrine of “sola Scriptura” (Scripture alone) and testify that we believe that the Bible has been inspired by God, and is complete, sufficient, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and effective.

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