

The Sufficiency of the Scriptures

2 Tim 3:10-4:5; John 6:60-69

It's Worse Than You Think!

While we were in Israel at the headwaters to the Jordan River we saw an old temple area dedicated to the worship of Pan and Zeus. We saw in other places mosaics thousands of years old depicting the god of wine – Dionysius – and the drunkenness that went with it. We saw an amazing Roman temple in Jerash in Jordan built to the glory of Artemis – mentioned in Acts 19 as a fertility goddess of the Ephesians.

We saw a modern-day syncretistic religion in Haifa in Israel in a beautiful and massive garden and temple built by the Bahais, ironically on the same mountain, Mt Carmel, where Elijah battled with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.

But amidst the reminders of pagan worship and the multiple gods of the Romans, amidst the reminders in Jordan of Moses' call to the Jewish nation to truly follow God, the worst, the absolute worst example of a people who had rejected the God who revealed himself to them, were the stories coming out of the Anglican western church in our day!

They were stories of ungodliness, syncretism and capitulation to the world. They were stories of a denomination (in part at least) that had lost its way, and was now abandoning the faith "handed down"¹ from the apostles and prophets.

Not quite the worst story, but close to it, was the story of an Anglican priest in the United States who when celebrating communion, puts a little statue of the god *Isis* on the communion table.

Isis is a goddess in Ancient Egyptian mythology and is celebrated as the ideal mother and wife, patron of nature and magic; friend of slaves, sinners, artisans,

*the downtrodden, as well as listening to the prayers of the wealthy, the maiden, the aristocrat and emperor. She is also connected to fertility cults.*²

When I speak of this later in my EFAC talk about GAFCON on July 22nd I will give more of a picture of what happened, but it is clear that large swathes of the Anglican Church no longer hold to the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith.

There is, according to their views, not much that we can know much about God or Jesus with any certainty. The scriptures, while given lip service, are ignored or reduced to mythical stories, illustrative, but not authoritative. So, they turn to alternatives, or mash beliefs about Christ in with other beliefs in attempting to make the faith more accessible and more meaningful to our modern world. They must, in all conscience, reject the creeds that speak so definitively of what we believe, for these church leaders and churches espouse not certainty, but ambiguity about morality and the things of Christ or of God.

Nothing could break the first commandment more obviously than a statue of a pagan goddess in a Christian service. Yet our own Adelaide Cathedral in 1992 allowed an exhibition to the Hindu goddess Kali to be displayed in the church. Altars of seed pods in the shape of vaginas were spread throughout the building in name of an art exhibition. And the then Archbishop and Dean of the cathedral saw nothing wrong with it and were astounded and annoyed by criticism of their ungodliness.

These events are a capitulation to the age, a loss of confidence in truth, a betrayal of God.

How Can This Be?

There is one foundational reason that goes to the heart of why this has occurred. How the western church can have moved so far away from the orthodox belief held and believed for thousands of years. Its starts, and

¹ See Luke 1:2

² Wikipedia

finishes really, at one point – a loss of confidence in the scriptures as **the** authority for our knowledge of God and how to worship him.

One American bishop has famously said - “the church wrote the Bible, we can change it any time we like”.

GAFCON was a conference looking at the future of the Anglican church (or the Anglican “Communion” as it is often called). The “media” interest was on the issues surrounding homosexuality. However, this was mentioned directly only very briefly at the conference - only twice in my memory of our main sessions.

The “real” issue was the place and authority the scriptures have in the life of the church.

The reason we gathered – some 1200 strong – was the slow but steady dilution the place of the scriptures have in the life of the church, especially in western churches. This applies across denominations, as the issues raised are not unique to Anglicans.

Let me be clear on this, your view of and approach to the Scriptures is not some esoteric debate about how to handle ancient texts, it is not just a discussion about different points of interpretation.

It is about whether we can truly know God, about whether there is a way to understand his purposes for us. It is about who determines and how we determine what is true, what is right, and what is of God. The debate over scripture raises questions of how we can know Jesus and how we can receive salvation.

Essentially then, your view of the scriptures affects your eternal destiny! If people’s eternal futures are at stake, this is an important issue to work through. We must not be lazy or slack in working this through. We must not lack the moral courage to stand up for an issue of such significance – in this

we have much to learn from our African brothers and sisters who are much more bold than we.

2 Tim 3:1-4:5

Paul the apostle, in his last days on this earth, penned a letter to Timothy, his son in the Lord. Preparing him for the challenges of leadership and the role of a teacher and pastor of the church, he outlines the foundation for believers in Jesus.

Suffering and persecution will result for all who live a godly life in Christ 3.12. People will be deceivers in the things of God v3.13, peddling false versions of the gospel and distorted views of Christ 4.3-4.

They will be interested only in hearing what makes them happy, what delights them. They will not be open to correction, because their version has all the marks of a man-made religion – comfortable, non-confronting, and accommodating to the world.

They will appeal to sensuality and lack of self control, Romans 1 tells us, and end up worshiping the creator rather than the creator. They will turn to unnatural sexual relations towards each other, act with wickedness and greed and welcome such behaviour. We see this in the western church which has replaced the authority of God and the scriptures with an authority of their own.

What is the solution to this problem?

In the well known words of Paul to Timothy we see that while he is to expect persecution for being godly, he is to continue strong in the faith that he learned and knew from his childhood and then he says...

^{3:16}All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Timothy is to **hold fast** to the scriptures that helped him grow in his faith. Understanding both their origins (God-breathed) and their purpose, they are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

He is then to continue to preach God's word faithfully, despite opposition - in view of the coming of Christ's kingdom and His judgement of all people.

There is no alternative to this course of action whether there is heresy within the church or paganism outside.

The scriptures are the cornerstone, the authoritative word of God, God-breathed (think of the creation being created from God's breath). Timothy, and every Christian (but especially a pastor-teacher) is to live life by them, to **continue** in them and in Timothy's case to patiently teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness through them. And right, godly living is a result of reflection upon God's word – it is to be a natural outcome, not an optional extra.

It is a view of God **defined by** and a world **critiqued** by the scriptures that leads to salvation as the Holy Spirit does his work. Any other source is merely hearsay. Why would you listen to any other source if God has breathed his word to us?! The scriptures are God's spiritual nourishment for the soul – why would you go anywhere else?

And it is clear that the specific context for this commitment to preaching God's word, with the assumptions of authority at their heart, is of the faithlessness and lack of commitment to sound doctrine within the church.

Timothy is to stand strong in the faith, not so much here because of secular or pagan or atheistic beliefs, but because those who would call themselves teachers in the church are watering down the truth of God's word.

^{4:3}*For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great*

number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

This is a prophecy, sadly fulfilled today!

The Classical Anglican View

Let me now digress into a little bit of history...

Martin Luther, the monk turned reformer of the Catholic Church in the 16th century, fashioned a phrase where he talked (in Latin) of three "solas". Sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia – by scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone. Others reformers added "by Christ alone" and "to the glory of God alone" to get five "solas".

At a time where Church Tradition had overtaken the scriptures as authoritative and Luther was under extreme pressure to back off from his "sola scriptura" view he said at his heresy trial - "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe". To move away from scripture was not safe as it imperilled the soul!

Sola scriptura was the foundation for the doctrine of scripture assumed in and enshrined by the Prayer Book of 1662 and subsequent Anglican teaching on the scriptures. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the essential creator of the 1662 Prayer book (and on which newer, modern prayer books are supposed to be based) incorporated the regular reading of scripture into Anglican services and into the substance of the Prayer Book wording because it was the **essential foundation of true faith**.

With the Prayer Book, Article 6 of the 39 articles (as well as articles 7 and parts of articles 17 and 20, 21, 34) outlines the doctrine of scripture at the heart of Anglicanism.

VI. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.

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 the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.... (and then there is a list of the books of the Bible³).

As J I Packer, a noted theologian, writes - Anglicanism says to the world: "Show us anything in Scripture that should be taught and that we are not teaching, and we will teach it. Show us anything we are teaching that is contrary to Scripture, and we will stop teaching it." The Bible, straightforwardly interpreted as revelation from God through human writers, is the Anglican rule of faith.⁴

There is the assumption in the Reformation that Scripture in its plain context could be understood just as well by the simple person ploughing his paddock as the monk at his prayer desk. No learned scholar has a monopoly on the word of God – it is not the preserve of priests and theologians. While there are challenges in reading some parts of the Bible, Scripture is clear. Despite what people say, by far the majority of the Bible is not hard to understand! I have heard children bring out marvellous truthful insights from the Bible and seen adults confuse and obfuscate its meaning (often in my view because they don't like its meaning!).

Our Anglican formularies likewise say that church tradition, while at times helpful, does and can err (see Articles 20 and 21). Scripture is primary and authoritative; tradition **is not an equal source** of divine words or divine insight. The American Bishop who said we can change the Bible anytime we like because the church wrote it, is wrong – and is not being Anglican!

Cranmer wrote in picturesque style - *Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament, and not run to the stinking*

³ NB "First and second Esdras" are actually Ezra and Nehemiah in our English translations. The "rest of the book of Esther" are an extra 6 chapters in the Greek Septuagint (not found in the Hebrew versions), including prayers to God - viewed as not original to the first part of the book. Probably added as there is no mention of God in the book (like Song of Songs).

⁴ "Who We Are and Where We Stand" - Address given at the [Anglican Network in Canada Conference](#), November 2007. http://www.gafcon.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=10&Itemid=9

*puddles of men's traditions, devised by man's imaginations, for our justification and salvation. For in holy Scripture is fully contained what we ought to do, and what to eschew, what to believe, what to love, and what to look for at God's hand at length.*⁵

Remember in those days with no toilets the "stinking puddles" were full of stuff in buckets thrown out of windows!

The suggestion that Anglicans hold "scripture, reason and tradition" as equal sources of authority is not Anglican doctrine.⁶

Article 6 also seeks not to add anything to scripture that is not evident for salvation. We do not urge people to believe things for their salvation that the scripture does not speak of or which cannot be proved by them. This is a corrective to those who may seek to add extra burdens to those coming to faith that the word of God does not require – a very evident human problem. I've often said for example, for those who question whether those who smoke are Christian – "Smoking won't send you to hell; it will just get you to heaven faster"!

Authentic Anglicanism submits to God's word and seeks to shape life and worship by it. Tradition (and reason which I have not discussed today) come a poor last as they can be skewed by our cultural and personal blinkers and sin and mislead. They can be helpful "searchlights" on God's word, illuminating parts of it, but are not authoritative.

Conclusion

The call upon us is like Timothy to **continue** in what we have learned from God's word, to be **confident** that the scriptures have all we need for salvation, all we need for truth about Christ and faith in his saving grace.... So

⁵ The First of Cranmer's Homilies – "A Fruitful exhortation to the reading of holy Scripture"

⁶ For great articles on this see the resource papers on the GAFCON website (www.gafcon.org) especially "Authority in the Church" by Mark Thompson, http://www.gafcon.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25&Itemid=16

that we might be thoroughly equipped to do His work in the world faithfully and truthfully.

This assumes we will oppose those who teach falsely and not stand idly by while God's word is reduced to human mumblings. It assumes as people's eternal destiny is at stake that we will not in politeness let heresy pass by without opposing it strongly! (Again our African friends have been surprised that we have let our church leaders say such heretical things for so long without sustained challenges to their leadership.)

It assumes we read the Bible regularly, prayerfully and humbly, asking for his Holy Spirit to illuminate our hearts with his word.

It assumes we are prepared to allow God's word to challenge our thinking and transform our behaviour.

Have you? Will you?

Let's pray

Book of Common Prayer (1662), Collects. 2nd Sunday in Advent

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them **read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest** them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. Amen.

Next week: the second of the "solos" - Faith Alone.

2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

¹⁰You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings - what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that all God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

^{4:1}In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

John 6:60-69

⁶⁰On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" ⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?" ⁶²Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." ⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

VI. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.

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 the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New

Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

Of the Names and Number of the Canonical Books.

Genesis, The First Book of Samuel, The Book of Esther, Exodus, The Second Book of Samuel, The Book of Job, Leviticus, The First Book of Kings, The Psalms, Numbers, The Second Book of Kings, The Proverbs, Deuteronomy, The First Book of Chronicles, Ecclesiastes or Preacher, Joshua, The Second Book of Chronicles, Cantica, or Songs of Solomon, Judges, The First Book of Esdras, Four Prophets the greater, Ruth, The Second Book of Esdras, Twelve Prophets the less.

And the other Books (as Hierome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine; such are these following:

The Third Book of Esdras, The rest of the Book of Esther, The Fourth Book of Esdras, The Book of Wisdom, The Book of Tobias, Jesus the Son of Sirach, The Book of Judith, Baruch the Prophet,

The Song of the Three Children, The Prayer of Manasses, The Story of Susanna, The First Book of Maccabees, Of Bel and the Dragon, The Second Book of Maccabees.

All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them Canonical.