WATERMARK
COMMUNITY CHURCH

CG Guide - Sola Scriptura

Series Outline

In November we have a new sermon series on what is called the "Five Solas". These are slogans of the Reformation in the 16th century, when the gospel was rediscovered after having been obscured by church tradition and false teaching for centuries.

Compared to the Roman Catholic church, the Reformers emphasized five '*alones'*. The RC church believed Scripture was authoritative, but also the pope, church tradition etc. The Reformers said Scripture *alone* was authoritative. The RC church believed you needed faith to be justified, but also good works. The Reformers said we are justified by faith *alone*.

The five slogans with their well-known Latin names, and also our five sermons, are:

- Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone)
- Sola Fide (Faith alone)
- Sola Gratia (Grace alone)
- Solus Christus (Christ alone)
- Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God alone)

They are topical sermons, so will draw on a variety of texts. Hence they are best discussed in CG after the sermon. However, due to the prayer meeting on 6 November this will not work for the first one on Sola Scriptura. Hence for the first one the study is done beforehand.

This study

The aim of this first study is to set up the sermon. You can think of it as a long introduction that raises the issues that the sermon will answer. So slightly different from looking at a bible passage yourselves beforehand. Some of it may feel a little bit unsatisfying - like watching an episode that ends on a cliffhanger, and the next episode will be the Sunday sermon.

The study will think about authorities in our life, why we need an ultimate one, and what kind of authority that needs to be. And we will see how Scripture is seen as the ultimate authority in the Bible. Why Scripture? That is what I will preach on come 1 November.

Questions

1. All people live their life based on what they believe to be true. What are different sources or 'authorities' people in the world have that tell them or influence them what to believe - consciously or not?

Introduction that raises the topic. What is what people believe based on? What is the authority that tells us the truth? It might be reason, science, school, our religion, our parents, our friends, books, social media, government propaganda…

2. How about religions? What sources or authorities do we see in religions, or streams of Christianity, as a basis of what people believe? (Not just ultimate ones)

   Zooming in towards religions and Christianity. Maybe there is a holy book like the Bible or the Qur'an. But also church tradition, organizations, religious leaders/ gurus/ experts, spiritual experiences, prophets/prophecies, or people's own thinking…

3. For you personally, how much do you think each of these influences your beliefs? Any others?
   a. Social media
   b. Friends
   c. Upbringing
   d. The Bible
   e. Pastors / churches
   f. My own thinking

   Making it personal. How much do these influence you?

4. Have you ever had conflict between different sources/authorities (e.g. your upbringing vs social media)? What did you do? What does it show we need?

   This is an issue. What if there is conflict? If your parents and your friends say different things, who will you believe? Or the Bible and social media? Or your experience and your own thinking? You can only go one way, so one of them is going to win. It means we need one ultimate authority.

5. What characteristics make someone/something a good authority to follow? What does this mean for e.g. your own thinking, social media, friends, pastors…

   If we need one ultimate authority, what kind do we need? Ultimately, a reliable, trustworthy one. One that tells the truth. There are various aspects to this. Do they know/have the truth? And are they good and loving and actually tell you that, or do they have their own self-serving agenda?

6. Why is it important to follow the right kind of authority? What if we follow the wrong one - especially when it comes to the truth about God and salvation?

   You want to follow the truth and not errors/lies. If you follow directions to a place, they need to be right. Esp. when it comes to God and salvation. Getting things wrong in other areas is manageable, e.g. health advice. But if you believe things wrong about God, how to be saved, you're not saved... E.g. John 8:24, 1 Cor 15:2.

   If people don't get there, maybe ask "Think back about 1 Thessalonians. What is our greatest priority? What do we need for that?"

Read these passages and look at them in pairs/groups or all together if you want. (*Matthew 15:1-9, Matthew 22:23-33, Acts 17:10-12, perhaps Galatians 1:6-9)*

7. What is the highest authority in each passage? And what is NOT the highest authority?

   We're moving towards Scripture Alone. In each passage Scripture is the most important. In Matthew 15 it's compared to religious tradition. In Matthew 22 it's reason (the Sadducees dismissed the resurrection as it had ridiculous consequences). In Acts 17 the Bereans test the gospel preacher's message against Scripture.

   In Galatians, if Paul or even an angel shows up with a different message than the true gospel, they should be cursed. Technically it doesn't say Scripture but the gospel message they received (they didn't have the NT yet). But the idea is very similar. Imagine the archangel Gabriel visiting you in person. If he says something contrary to the official gospel, you should pronounce a curse on him. Angels are not the highest authority.

8. What do you think is the reason Scripture should be the highest authority?

   Let people think about it - don't push for an answer! Sunday we will tackle this.

9. How should this view of Scripture affect us? E.g. in your last major decision, what factors were most important in what you decided? How did Scripture fit into it?

   Starting to think about applications. Clearly we want to know Scripture so we can use it to measure everything else. And in decisions Scripture comes first, not our desires or what other people think. Does it…

WATERMARK
COMMUNITY CHURCH

10. What questions do you have, going into Sunday?

WATERMARK
COMMUNITY CHURCH

CG Guide - Sola Fide (Faith Alone) - Romans 3:21-4:8

This study

This second study is different from Sola Scriptura. We will be looking back at last Sunday - Kevin's sermon on 8 November - rather than looking forward.

This week is Faith Alone which was how the Reformation basically started. We only need to trust Jesus and then receive his righteousness. No need to produce our own righteousness through good works, sacraments, religious devotion, indulgences etc. This was Luther's great re-discovery of the gospel.

The questions touch on various things from the sermon so that we understand it and can apply it. The main passage is Romans 3:21-4:8..

Questions

1. Anything that struck you from Sunday's sermon?

   Starting with open sharing

2. How would you explain the sermon's topic of "Justified by Faith Alone" from Romans 3:21-26? How can someone's faith be enough to be fully accepted by God?

   Getting this clear. Justified means we are accepted as righteous by God. We're accepted "Just as if I'd" never sinned. "By faith" means we are accepted through trusting in Jesus and what he did for us (v22, 25). And there is nothing more we need to do than trusting Jesus, no matter who you are ("there is no distinction", 3:22).

   It is not because God thinks faith is such a great thing we do that he thinks it's enough to accept us. Rather it is how we receive this righteousness from God. Romans 3:24-25 says we are justified "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood". Propitiation means an atoning sacrifice, which was Jesus' blood (i.e. death). This sacrifice is what redeems us. But it is "to be received by faith" (v25) - faith is just the channel to receive it.

3. Faith alone excludes works (3:28, 4:5). Why would we need to be justified by faith alone apart from any works we do? How much is this a daily reality for you?

   The passage says it is "apart from works of the law" (3:28), for the person who "does not work" (4:5). The things we do don't enter into it. The reason we need Christ's righteousness is that we don't have our own. 3:23 - all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We don't do much good and even the good we do is tainted by sin. That's why before Romans 3:21 ("But now") we get two chapters of why everyone is sinful. We know this in theory, but some of us live life doing pretty well and we're not that aware of how sinful we are. Good to discuss, and maybe ask what we can do to be more aware of this (and hence cling to Christ more).

4. Faith alone means we don't need to add anything to just trusting Jesus. What things do people tend to rely on for their standing before God? Which are you tempted by?

   We tend to trust in all kinds of things. Keeping the rules. Good deeds. A lack of bad deeds. Baptism. The Lord's Supper. Reading the Bible. Praying. Going to church. Family background. Lots of things that we can trust in for God to accept us. But faith in Jesus is all we need.

5. Compare Romans 3:28 and James 2:24. What do Paul and James each mean by key terms, from the context of the verses? Why are Paul and James not contradictory?

   Doing good works is probably the most common thing people think they need to add. And James seems to support this "Faith without works is dead". This is often brought up, but it is not a contradiction. Paul is talking about how we can be accepted by God - trusting Jesus alone, not our good works. James is talking about what true faith looks like - not an intellectual belief only, but shown in loving deeds.

	Paul	*James*
Faith	*Trusting Jesus for salvation*	*Intellectual belief*
Works	*Good works done to earn salvation*	*Good works out of a changed heart*
Justified	*Declared righteous by God (though you're not)*	*Shown to be right/genuine/true (which you are)*

6. How might it be seen in our life whether we are trusting in Jesus alone or (also) in other things?

   We would all say we are trusting in Jesus, but do we? Kevin mentioned defensiveness - if we know we have Christ's righteousness we don't need to defend ourselves. If we do, we should wonder if we really understand this magnificent truth. There will be other things - pride in achievements, despair when failing….

7. How has this sermon made you love Christ and the gospel more?

   Nice finish