

# Class 3: The Word of God

## (*Sola Scriptura* and Beyond)

- I. Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521
  - “Unless I am **convinced by Scripture** and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - **my conscience is captive to the Word of God**. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”
- II. Popes and Councils
  - A. Teaching of the Catholic Church
    1. “Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, §82.)
    2. “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. ...the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, §85.)
  - B. A Crisis of Authority
    1. **The Avignon Papacy** (1309-1377)
      - It began when Clement V, newly elected Pope, refused to move to Rome, and instead moved his court to Avignon, France. Pope Gregory IX returned the court to Rome in 1377.
    2. **The Papal Schism** (1378-1417)
      - Fear of continued French corruption caused riots after Gregory’s death to force the election of a Roman as Pope. With no viable Roman candidates, the cardinals elected a man from Naples. He proved to be a bad choice, and the cardinals met again and elected another pope, who moved his court to Avignon (again). Thus there were two duly elected popes. A Council established a third, but neither of the other’s resigned. Finally, the Council of Constance secured two resignations, excommunicated the third Pope, and elected a new Pope. This council also condemned Jan Hus.
  - C. Luther and the disputation with Eck, 1519
    - “A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. As for the pope’s decretal on indulgences I say that neither the Church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and councils.”
- III. Humanism, Erasmus, and the Greek New Testament
  - A. Humanism and Return to the Sources (*Ad Fontes*)
  - B. The Vulgate, Jerome’s Latin translation

1. This was the official Bible of the Catholic Church
  2. There were various versions, but the most widely circulated was a fairly corrupt printed edition.
- C. Erasmus' Greek New Testament, 1516
- D. Examples of doctrinal reform that came from returning to the Greek:
1. **Matthew 4:17**: Did Jesus command us to "Do penance" or "Repent"?
    - a) Thesis 1 of the 95 Theses:
      - (1) "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." (Thesis 1)
      - (2) "This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction, as administered by the clergy." (Thesis 2)
    - b) Penance: Go find a priest, confess your sins, perform any deeds of absolution he prescribes
    - c) Repent: A change of mind and heart, a turning from sin or disbelief
  2. **Luke 1:28**: Is Mary "full of grace," or a "favored one." Thus Catholic doctrine came to view her as a *dispenser of grace*, not a *recipient of grace*.

#### IV. Perspicuity and Interpretation

- A. **Perspicuity** (Perspicacity): An unclear word that means clarity
1. This is the teaching that the central doctrines of Scripture are clearly understood by the reader.
  2. Implication: The meaning of Scripture is not beyond the grasp of the average Christian, and so does not need to be mediated by a special class of interpreters.
  3. Implication: This gives responsibility to the believer to read the Scriptures to know for himself what they teach.
  4. Implication: The Scriptures are sufficient to teach a man all he needs to know in order to be saved.
- B. Interpretation
1. Catholic Interpretation
    - a) Only the church leadership (the Pope and the bishops in communion with him) can give authoritative interpretation of Scripture.
    - b) How the Bible is interpreted
      - (1) The Four Ways. John Cassian (360-435) proposed four senses of Scripture, "The one Jerusalem can be understood in four different ways, in the historical sense as the city of the Jews, in allegory as the Church of Christ, in anagoge as the heavenly city of God 'which is the mother of us all' (Gal 4:26), in the tropological sense as the human soul."
        - (a) Literal - the historical meaning; that intended by the human author.

(b) Allegorical, or Typological - the spiritual meaning, the “eternal truths” taught by the “facts narrated” (Augustine)

(c) Anagogical - Predictive of future events or descriptive of the future estate

(d) Tropological - moral instruction

(2) Some medieval scholars emphasized one level more than another. For instance, some believed that the latter three senses should only be sought if there was some difficulty of understanding the first. For others, the literal sense was the least important; the more hidden meanings should always be sought.

(3) Officially, the literal sense was supposed to rule, but practically, the tropological sense preached the best. It answered the question, “How should I live my life to best please God.” In a moralistic, legalistic system where salvation is largely dependent on our earning it, it makes sense that this would be the focus of popular preaching.

(4) How do you keep anyone from saying anything when interpreting the meaning? Can’t anyone basically make up whatever they want?

(a) Adherence to tradition

(b) Control of the magisterium.

(5) Nevertheless, interpretations could get pretty far-fetched.

2. Reasons why an ordinary Catholic layman would hesitate to study the Scripture himself

a) He was not able to read

b) The Bible was in a different language than what he spoke

c) The approved method of interpretation could be complex

d) Those who had not simply accepted the verdict of the church in the interpretation of Scripture had met bad ends. They were heretics. They were excommunicated. They were often burned.

e) The best thing was to leave interpretation of Scripture to the experts.

3. Reformation Interpretation

a) Who interprets the Bible?

(1) The Holy Spirit

(2) The Believer

b) How the Bible is interpreted

(1) Historical Grammatical (“Literary”) Interpretation

(2) Any given passage is seen as having one meaning, with the possibility of many *applications*.

V. Translating into the Vernacular

A. **Vernacular:** An unusual word meaning usual words

B. While Humanism returned to Greek, the Reformers translated into the language of the people.

1. Catholics were stuck in the middle, neither an original nor a contemporary Bible.

2. The Humanists would have been content to leave it in Greek (“*Ad fontes*”) (Erasmus was a notable exception, but he was also very much a churchman and moralistic reformer also).

3. The Reformers insisted on freshly translating it into the vernacular and giving the laity access to the Word of God.
- C. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German
  - D. English Bible translations
    1. Wyclif
    2. Tyndale
    3. The Geneva Bible
    4. The King James Version
- VI. The Word of God as Teacher of Theology
- A. How does the average person know his faith? The Reformers taught that each believer should have direct access to the Word of God in his own language.
  - B. Religious Art was often defended by Catholics as “laymen’s books.”
  - C. An Example:
    1. Imagine walking into a Catholic church and seeing a large and elaborate statue of Mary, flowers and a bank of candles before her, and an elderly woman kneeling before her. Is she worshipping Mary? No, she is praying the Rosary.
    2. Catholicism three levels of veneration:
      - a) *Latria*, “Worship,” due to God alone
      - b) *Dulia*, “Veneration” or “Honor,” due to the saints
      - c) *Hyperdulia*, “Highest honor,” due to Mary
    3. Can these distinctions be communicated accurately through art?
      - a) Not likely
      - b) The fact that Mohammed mistakenly believed that the Christian Trinity was The Father, Jesus, and Mary suggests that this distinction was not well understood.

Coming up in 2 weeks....

- How did the Bible bring reform under Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and in England?
- Preaching the Word and the Reformation