

A Defense of the Doctrines of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Only) and Sola Fide (Faith Only) for Souls Deluded by Seductive Spirits and Doctrines of Devils

Christ tells Nicodemus, that Pharisee, teacher and ruler of the Jews who came to him by night: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-16).

An omnipotent God lowering himself to such a depth of humiliation as to allow himself to be lifted up on a cross to die a slow death at the hand of his ungrateful creature presents such an impossible scene that the mind is repelled by it. Therefore, Christ does not appeal to the oral tradition of the Jews, which knows nothing of such a God, but to the Holy Scriptures alone, specifically Numbers 21:9, which tells how those who looked at the serpent that was lifted up from the earth were given life. Love for one’s friends makes some sense, but a love that reveals itself in a divine Redeemer becoming sin for his enemies that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (II Corinthians 5:21) is not only ludicrous to human reason but offensive to human pride. Yet Christ, the eternal Word by whom all things were created, in the presence of a respected Pharisee, dares compare himself, the incarnate Creator, not to some noble earthly being but to a serpent lifted up in a wilderness. And as if this were not enough, Christ is so bold as to disregard the requirements of the law, saying that just as those who looked at the serpent of Moses were saved from death by simply looking, those who believe in this Son of God will be saved from death and live eternally by simply believing.

The Pharisees understood the words of Christ perhaps even better than his own disciples, for after his death, fearing that his body would be stolen by them, they said to Pontius Pilate, “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again” (Matthew 27:63). Not understanding the prophecies, they expected the promised Messiah to be an earthly ruler in a grand palace in Jerusalem, one loved, feared and respected by all and one who would deliver the righteous from all their earthly enemies. Nothing could have been more objectionable than to see a humble man of poor parents in Galilee do miracles, be viewed as the Messiah, and tell them that it was not their meticulous adherence to the law of Moses but only belief in him that could save them from sin, death and hell. And on top of it all, he dares call them hypocrites and a generation of vipers. What audacity! What spiritual pride! The miracles done by such a fellow, who rejects the law of Moses as the only rule of life and method of salvation and us as its teachers, can only be done by the devil (Luke 11:15). Where does our law teach faith in him? Where does the law teach that this faith, and only this faith, without works, saves a man from sin, death, hell and the devil? This man thinks he is above the law! How dare he invalidate a law given by God himself to such respectable people as ourselves! It is not fitting that he should live (Acts 22:22). The next thing he will say is, Let us do evil that good may come (Romans 3:8).

Hearing such accusations, Christ replied, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” For Christ fulfilled the law by his life and work, but the Pharisees indeed invalidated the law by their own tradition, as Christ says to them, “Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:9). Unlike the Pharisees, Christ gave no heed to tradition but only to the law of God, which he fulfilled perfectly by his irreproachable conduct and by laying down his life as a sacrifice for sinners so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the

Spirit (Romans 8:4). Neither does Paul, therefore, trust in the flesh, for he says, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2: 8).

Arguing with the Jews, Christ did not appeal to John the Baptist, nor even to himself, let alone to tradition, but said, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true” (John 5:31). He then appealed directly to the witness of the Father in the Holy Scriptures (which agreed with his own works), saying, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). Paul, accordingly, tells Timothy, in his final epistle, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Here he asks Timothy to bear in mind that he had been taught by none other than Paul himself (whose words, though he is gone, are now recorded in the New Testament) and that from a child he had also known the Old Testament. He then concludes, saying, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:14-17). Paul taught nothing other than that which had already been written in the Old Testament, as he himself says in his defense before Agrippa, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

Peter testifies that the epistles of Paul were accepted as canonical already in his time, for speaking of Paul’s epistles, he says that in them there are “some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (II Peter 3:16). The rest of the canon of the New Testament was also completed and accepted by the church in the apostolic era. John, who wrote the final account of Christ’s life and work, confirms the validity of the other accounts by his silence in regard to the events recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, only supplementing them, and concludes the last book of the Bible with the words, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18). Jude was aware of the prophecies of the Second Epistle of Peter, for he paraphrases them in his own epistle. Paul quotes Luke 10:7 as scripture: “The labourer is worthy of his reward” (I Timothy 5:18). Luke himself, referring to his Gospel, confirms in Acts 1:1 that he had written a former treatise of “all that Jesus began both to do and teach,” and in Luke 1:1 he mentions that others (Matthew and Mark) had already “taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration” of the same things.

Christ tells of a rich man in hell who asked Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to warn his brothers, lest they also come there, but Abraham answered, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” The rich man did not believe this even in hell and objected, saying: “Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.” But the answer he received was: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:19-31). The Pharisees likewise gave more heed to their own reason and tradition than to Moses and the prophets, and so they could not recognize a poor, despised and rejected man as their Messiah. For they had no need for a suffering Saviour, not having a proper sense of sin and unworthiness, which should have come by their law (Romans 3:20). Instead, viewing him as a threat to their power, they reviled, persecuted and finally killed him.

Thus the Pharisee of Luke 18:10-12 approached God as though he had never fallen into sin with the rest of mankind. In the typical manner of self-righteous persons, he thanked not himself but God, who had protected him from vices and enabled him to live a religious life: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” In their confession, worship and prayers, such persons conveniently overlook the two main themes of the Bible: The fall into sin and the redemption of the world by the Seed of the Woman. They focus instead on the law, works and self-sanctification. They take only scant notice of the tree of death and the tree of life, mentioned in the third chapter of Genesis and the themes that follow them throughout the Bible.

Since the taking of the fruit of the forbidden tree, sin has taken such hold of mankind that even Paul has to admit in the seventh chapter of Romans that he is “sold under sin,” and that in his flesh there “dwelleth no good thing.” He then adds: “For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (verses 14-19). His will is so captive to this law of sin, as he calls it, that he refers to the state that he is in as death, saying, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (verse 24). Experiencing this truth, the publican in the temple could only look down, beat his breast and say, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Solomon also says, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). And Isaiah goes so far as to say, using plural nouns, that even “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), for whatever is or is called righteousness in this world is reproved by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). A good tree does not bring forth bad fruit (Matthew 7:17), “for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

The law promises life to those who keep it and condemns to death those who transgress it: “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5,6). These words, which put teeth into the law, show that it is not simply a set of recommendations but a binding covenant. Only such who have truly tried to keep it can understand the frustration of Paul and why he has to take refuge in the second theme of the Bible, namely, redemption and freedom from the law. For, as he explains to the Romans and Galatians, the law was given not to give life but to teach us about ourselves and our inability to recover ourselves from the bondage of the sin under which we are sold. Christ says, “No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house” (Mark 3:27). It is impossible for us to motivate our own will to make our unholy flesh fulfill the terms and conditions of God’s holy law. Paul says that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

This is why Christ, speaking with Nicodemus, disposes entirely with the law and its stipulations as a method of gaining life and salvation, saying simply, Believe on me and you will live forever. The Gospel gives life and forgiveness unconditionally. It is not a guide on what steps are to be taken by those who want to be saved. It says, God gave his only begotten Son to save us through faith. It offers mercy, forgiveness, life and peace freely to all fallen mankind while the law only threatens the violator with condemnation. These two doctrines cannot exist together in the conscience, for the one cancels out the other, leaving the sinner in whom they are effective in either terror or peace. Christ lived and died to fulfill the law for us and finally cried out from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Paul is so bold, therefore, as to utter words that make modern theologians

and all who trust in themselves shudder, namely, that the law is nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14), that the commandment is disannulled (Hebrews 7:18) and that the ministration of death is abolished (II Cor. 3:13). He can also say that Christ, the promised lawgiver of Judah (Genesis 49:10), has issued a new covenant of grace, which supersedes and thus replaces the former covenant of works: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second" (Hebrews 10:9).

Such words are, of course, a threat and offense to the pride of the Pharisees, to their long public prayers, to their tithing, to their special garments, to their titles and to their exclusive society. Unlike Christ's disciples, who greet every house they enter (Matthew 10:12), the self-righteous are selective in their association with others, greeting only their brethren (Matthew 5:47). If they were to now admit that even they could not keep the law but that God had to become man to die even for them, they would lose their unique status. Thus, beginning with Cain, who offered the fruit of his own labor, rather than a blood sacrifice, the self-righteous have defended their own human potential, disregarding the story of the fall and ignoring the words of God to the serpent, that the Seed of the Woman, not the seed of the man but one begotten of a virgin, would crush his head and deliver us from his power (Genesis 3:15), which we could not do through our own will and power, having fallen utterly in Paradise. Thus they hated, persecuted and killed the prophets who prophesied of his coming, then mocked and killed him as well and still revile and persecute his beloved friends and followers daily.

Christ also says to Nicodemus that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, not for any exclusive group or sect, not just for Jews or Pharisees, neither for those who are worthy or unworthy, not even for the elect alone, but for the whole world, that is, for all men, as John also confirms, saying, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2). Those who believe that Christ died only for themselves, or for the elect, try to defend their own exclusivity by saying that John is speaking here as a Jew and that this verse means that he died not only for the elect among the Jews but also for the elect among the Gentiles. But such an interpretation is clearly refuted by the whole context, for from the very beginning of the epistle, where John identifies himself as a witness of the resurrected Christ, he does not waver from his use of the pronoun "we," speaking consistently in each and every verse as nothing other than as a Christian, as any conscientious reader can confirm for himself.

Christ is, as John the Baptist also testifies, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Here sin is mentioned in the singular, for it is not a matter of individual sins being atoned for from time to time, but, as Paul writes, "now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). Speaking of the priesthood of Christ, Paul says that Christ does not need to offer sacrifices daily, "for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Hebrews 7:27), and that "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10). He then says that the sacrifices offered by the priests "can never take away sins, but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12), meaning that he has rested from his work as a priest. He then says again, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Thus John can say, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (I John 3:8,9).

By offering up the Son of God, the priests exposed the full depravity of the human race. Christ came not to the heathen but to his own dear people, those who prided themselves on being the best examples of humanity. Among these, the best and most noble of all times and places, the chief priests, to whom God had entrusted his law and temple, and the elders of the Jews, persuaded the multitude to ask Pilate to free Barabbas and destroy Jesus, and then they all cried out, "Let him be crucified," adding, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:20-25). This is, now mankind at the zenith of human history making its maximum effort to please God. This is human potential at the pinnacle of its glory. Here we see human wisdom and righteousness at its best, as our dear Creator and kind Redeemer, the loving Heavenly Parent, is nailed up to suffer and die as an evil malefactor and heretic, hanging naked on a cruel cross, being subjected to unspeakable suffering at the hand of respectable human beings, who strut cockily about him, proud of their sense of justice and righteousness and anxious to end this farce at sundown, to bury this troublemaker, so that they, the children of the night, can retreat to their homes to scrupulously reenact the Passover at their tables in their best apparel with their families, as required by Moses in their law. How appropriate it is, therefore, for the Holy Spirit, through the apostles, to reprove the world not only for sin but also for righteousness and judgment (John 16:8)!

This is the world we experience daily, and if we are honest with ourselves, having compared ourselves with the strict commandments of God's law, which even condemn our evil thoughts and command unfailing and consistent love for both God and man, we must conclude that the Holy Scriptures are true, which define mankind's condition as follows: "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:10-18). Only when a man sees himself in this state, in which all the world under the law is guilty before God, will he recognize and welcome a Saviour from sin, death, hell and the devil, and from the law, which is the strength of sin (I Corinthians 15:56).

The members of the early apostolic church lived in a place and at a time where the law of Moses was the law of the land. This means that they were not only required by the authorities to keep the Ten Commandments but all the rituals and judicial aspects of the law as well. No distinction was made in the courts between believers and unbelievers or between ceremonial and moral laws, for all citizens were subject to the whole law. When transgressions were committed, animal sacrifices were offered. Certain foods were avoided, and Peter went so far as to even avoid eating with Gentile believers in Antioch, for which he was rebuked by Paul (Galatians 2:11,12). Both believers and unbelievers shaved their heads in accordance with the law, after making a vow (Acts 21:24). In fact, James sums up the attitude of the early church quite well when he says that the Jewish believers were all "zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20).

The fifteenth chapter of Acts tells how after God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, certain Pharisees in the church began to say that it was necessary to circumcise them also in accordance with the law and to command them to keep the law of Moses if they expected to be saved. The question arose, therefore, as to whether those Gentiles "whose hearts had been purified by faith," and who were, therefore, justified before God, were to be subjected by the church to the law as a rule of life if they expected to be saved from this world on the Last Day. The apostles and

elders gathered together, therefore, at a council in Jerusalem to discuss this issue. There, after much disputing, Peter said, “God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (verses 8-11). James admits, therefore, as a Jewish believer, that for him too the law was an unbearable yoke, and so at the end of the discussion he concludes, saying, “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (verses 19,20).

In spite of this decision, which makes no distinction between ceremonial and moral aspects of the law, the opinion prevails to this day in nominal Christianity that only the ceremonial law is abolished by the Gospel and that the Ten Commandments, the moral law, without the accompanying curse, remain as a rule of life for the believer. If this opinion is true, why did the other apostles not disagree with Peter and James? Why did they not point out that God wanted to abolish the ceremonial law only but that the moral law was to be retained as a rule of life for the believer? Why did James add the words to the end of his address, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (verse 21)? Why did the other apostles and elders agree then with James and write letters with him, freeing the Gentiles from the law and exhorting them only to shun idolatry and fornication, which are forbidden under the moral law, when they could just as easily have exhorted them, as our own legalists do, to keep the whole moral law as a rule of life? Unless such questions can be answered, it remains clear that the freedom intended by the words in the letters of the apostles and elders to the Gentiles, who had never been under the ceremonial law, is comprehensive. For by addressing both moral (idolatry and fornication) and ceremonial (things strangled and blood) aspects of their religion, the apostles and elders show clearly in their decision that they viewed their law as an undivided whole, from all of which they declare the Gentiles free, exhorting them only to avoid certain aspects of their lives that were most offensive to Jews.

Paul, defending this decision, writes to the Galatians, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). He writes this because many believed that now that they had been converted by the Gospel they could return to the law for sanctification. So Paul asks rhetorically, “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” He writes these words from Rome, many years after the apostolic council at which the matter should have been resolved, and to this day many remain quite zealous in their struggle under the law, not daring to believe a sin against the law as forgiven until it is confessed and absolution is received. Satan, the angel of light, has deluded them into believing that they, like the deluded Galatians, are able to complete their sanctification themselves through their own efforts under the law. Paul makes it clear, however, that those who believe even to the slightest degree in themselves are fallen from grace, saying, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9), and “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). If Paul were here distinguishing between moral and ceremonial laws, implying that believers remain under the moral law as a guide or rule of life, there would have been no need for him to add a moral exhortation when mentioning liberty, but he says, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

And if he were speaking of only a ceremonial law, he could not in the next verse summarize that law in moral terms, saying, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Paul, therefore, emphasizes that the law is not established as a rule of life for the regenerate person, saying, “If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (Galatians 5:18), and “After that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:25). And he makes similar statements in his other epistles: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4). Paul, therefore, concludes his epistle to the Galatians, saying, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:15,16).

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