

## EDITORIAL

Historically, evangelicalism has been defined by two foundational convictions—first, that the church’s final authority is Scripture alone, and second, that justification is by grace through faith alone. Those dual realities, known respectively as the *formal* and *material principles* of the Reformation, distinguish biblical Christianity from every other system of religion. For the Reformers, those two principles were inseparable and non-negotiable. They recognized that a high view of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*) demanded a biblically-accurate gospel (*sola fide*).

The evangelical church today finds itself in an identity crisis of its own making. By compromising on their commitment to the authority of Scripture, many evangelicals are subsequently confused about the gospel. Competing authorities to Scripture come in many forms: the teachings of evolutionary science, charismatic words of prophecy, market-driven church growth strategies, the ecumenical spirit of the age, and so on. But the point is this: believers cannot capitulate on their commitment to the authority of Scripture without simultaneously compromising their understanding of salvation. The two are intrinsically linked.

One vivid illustration of this is seen in the area of sanctification. The Lord Jesus addresses the connection between Scripture and sanctification in John 17:17, where He prays to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

Broadly speaking, the veracity of Jesus’ statement is universally acknowledged within the parameters of evangelical Christianity. But there is a growing chorus of voices that are singing a different tune—a melody that some claim is harmony, while others contend it is dissonance and discord. What is this new tune? It is the conviction that in the pursuit of sanctification, scriptural truths may (or in some cases must) be augmented by “truths” discovered by human investigation and observation.

There is a watershed drift away from a sanctification rooted in the Scriptures to one that finds its nourishment in general revelation and human wisdom. General revelation has been endowed with a level of validity merited only by special revelation. Giving general revelation and the human wisdom derived from it equal (or even preeminent) footing with special revelation attributes an authority to it which it does not possess.

Some have attempted to undercut the authority of special revelation, suggesting that since man is finite and fallen, his conclusions derived from Scripture can be no more authoritative than those garnered from general revelation. But the perspicuity

of Scripture argues loudly otherwise. A book whose instructions are shrouded in obscurity could not begin to do what it is asked to do or deliver what it promises.

The spiritual resources which believers often seek outside of Scripture are something they already possess. The Word of God is not insufficient to equip us for Christian living. Paul reminded the Colossians that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Christ alone is sufficient to provide the nourishment necessary for spiritual growth. Peter concurs, declaring that the believer has been “granted everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him.”

By denying or redefining the inerrancy of the Scriptures, they fail to make a full disclosure of the strong foundation and abundant resources available to the believer in the pursuit of Christlikeness. And in doing so, a man-centered doctrine of sanctification is propagated. It’s like Paul asked the Galatians, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

Underselling the Word of God in the pursuit of sanctification suggests the Scriptures have some intrinsic inadequacy or imperfection. It intimates the need to augment these scriptural deficiencies with insights gained from human wisdom. Fraught with the pervasive power of humanistic thinking, it is like rising flood waters, eroding the authority of the Word and draining its effectiveness. Those seeking avenues of godly living through means other than the Word of God are thereby forfeiting the most valuable and only reliable source of spiritual provision and growth.

Believers today must guard against underselling the Word of God. We must know, not only that our justification is by faith alone, but that God has provided for our sanctification as well. As partakers of His divine grace, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. Simply put, only an inerrant Word can deliver what it promises.

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