

Alone

Words matter. Rude words offend. Kind words encourage. Carefully used words aid clarity of thought and action.

Purpose

Why do we use words? The usual answer is because they help us communicate. They have that function in every language. The letters may differ. The pronunciation may also be very different. The purpose is similar. We use words to convey ideas and thoughts. We use words to distinguish objects (*a cat is not a dog*).

Language

Mankind is different. Although there are similarities with animals we are not animals. We are people created

in the image of God. This is not a result of Evolution but Creation. God made us capable of rational thought. He made us able to communicate one with another in sophisticated ways. He made us to speak and use words. In these respects we are like him.

Paul reminds us that in eternity, before the creation of the cosmos, God made choices (*Ephesians 1*). He discussed and decided matters in himself. We can do the same.

God has spoken

Throughout the Bible we discover that God has spoken to mankind. He has communicated with us about himself and his will for us. He is the Creator who always is. He is all-powerful and sovereignly rules over all. No one and no thing can thwart his purposes. He is compassionate, gracious and kind. He has made us to live for him. We exist not to please ourselves but him alone.

The God who has spoken is the God who still speaks. Because he is all-powerful we recognise as God spoke face to face with Moses (*Numbers 12*) he could do the same again with another. However we also recognise he has made known to us what he

said in former times. He has caused the words he wants us to hear to be recorded in one place, The Bible.

We also know God has promised the aid of his Holy Spirit. He takes the word of God and shows it to us. He helps us to understand it. He enables us to believe it. And he empowers us to live by it.

A Key word

The more we get to know the message of The Bible the more we begin to see one word is crucial. It is the word *alone* or *only*. In what follows we shall use both words but we do so knowing they both point us to an idea we need to firmly grasp.

There is an important question to ask: Is The Bible a collection of religious ideas thought up by people like Abraham, Moses, David and Paul or is it a specific message?

Liberal thinkers favour the notion it is little more than the musings of people who had experiences of God. Those who take seriously the teaching of Jesus Christ recognise it is God's word to mankind. Although written over many years (at least 1500) by many people it conveys one

message. It is the product of progressive revelation by God. He used different people in different circumstances. Each is used for the one purpose: to provide mankind with the definitive message God wants to us hear. It is for this reason that we use the term *Scripture alone*.

Scripture Alone

Five hundred years ago the term appeared in its Latin form, *Sola Scriptura*. We use it to remind ourselves we are not to search for truth in our own minds or experience. Rather we are to find it in The Bible alone. This does not mean that we are not to think. Of course we are. What it means is that we are to bring the ideas and thoughts we have under the authority of what God has revealed.

The Bible is the standard or rule by which all is to be tested. If what we say coheres with and in no way contradicts Scripture we know we are thinking on the right lines. However if our ideas do not then we know they are wrong. There is no other objective measure we can use. If people say God has given them a message or revealed to them something which we do not find

taught in The Bible we know a deceiving spirit is at work. God never contradicts himself. He is always true to himself and his word. He would not be God if he was not.

Christ Alone

The more we hear the message of the Bible the more we discover it is primarily about one person, Jesus Christ.

In the first part of The Bible (often called the Old Testament) we find he is the one promised. We read in the history books (e.g. Samuel, Kings and Chronicles) of the way God dealt with his people. In the Law (the first five books of The Bible) we read of how his people became a distinct group and we read the commands and rules they were to heed and obey. In the prophets we see God chastened and disciplined his people when they were wayward.

These are somewhat rough and ready ways to summarise major parts of Scripture. The key point that runs through all is that God's people are taught to expect a rescuer who will give them access to God. That one is God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

In the second part of The Bible (usually called the New Testament) we read of the first coming of the promised Christ. The circumstances of his birth as a man are given. So too are the essential details of what he taught. Above all we read of his death and resurrection. We are given the explanation we need of Christ's person and work in the writings of the apostles. We discover the Christ who came and died now reigns with God. And we find the day is coming when he shall come again to judge the living and the dead.

All these facts lead to one great fact: in Christ alone forgiveness is to be found. It is in Christ alone that access to God and intimate fellowship with God is to be experienced and enjoyed.

Grace Alone

This leads naturally on to another key fact. Mankind does not deserve the good things God invites us to find and enjoy. The invitation is given to all.

Every day God's calls us to depend upon and love him. Each day he invites us to know and enjoy his love and peace. The goodness of God is

never to be questioned. The amazing truth is, all who experience it do so by grace.

Two things are true of mankind. One, we are spiritually dead to God . As such we cannot make ourselves alive to him. Two, it is impossible to earn his favour by what we think, say or do. Why is that so? Because sin rules in our lives. Sin is lawlessness. It is an active principle of evil that mars every aspect of our beings. We cannot eradicate it. Nor can we gain victory over it. Only God gives victory. He does so in Jesus Christ alone. He does so by grace (his free favour) alone.

Faith Alone

All we have said above is not to lead us to think there is absolutely nothing we should do. The call of God to mankind is for us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to put our trust in him. Put another way, we are to have faith in him.

God calls us to have a change of mind and heart. We are to think in a different way about Jesus Christ. We are to come to see who he is (God made man); what he has done (he lived a perfect life in the place of

imperfect people); what he has secured (forgiveness by dying the death we deserve to die for our sins for ever); and what he gives (eternal life). And God calls us to receive all these things through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

One Word Matters

The word *alone* is crucial. When we combine it with Scripture, Christ, Grace and Faith we find it sums up the key message God wants us to hear.

We have the record we need of what he has said. He has given a Saviour. We do not deserve what he gives. And we come to enjoy him in one way only. It is by grace through faith in the Christ who is revealed to us in Scripture. The amazing fact is faith is a gift of God.

The word *alone* may not seem important to some. It is to the Christian.