

### XIII. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective

#### *Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders*

“Sola Scriptura”

Luke 9:28–36

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October 26, 2014 – Morning Sermon

I’m going to start this study by first reading the initial verses of Luke 9 about this monumental event. Luke 9:28-31 says [28] *Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. [29] And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. [30] And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, [31] who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is an interesting event. I love this reformation Sunday because I get to hear my favorite instrument, I get to sing my favorite hymn, *For All the Saints* and I get to talk about my favorite subject which is we’re saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. The Scripture alone informs us of that for the glory of God alone which is our greatest joy. So it doesn’t get any better than this for me. This is a glorious moment and privilege to declare such majestic truth but I think there is something more that I want to get to in the context of contending and defending the faith.

In 1519, on the shoulders of men who went before him like Huss, Wycliffe and others, Martin Luther had been grappling with his soul. His soul was not right with God. In his Augustinian order he had done everything he could possibly think of from penance, to punishing his body to deeds, giving and everything but he couldn’t find peace because he knew he was a sinner and the justice of God hung over him. He could not atone for his sins. How can a man be right with God? Then God sent him to the book of Galatians and Romans and was given the responsibilities to teach it and there he found his answer.

You’re saved by grace alone and yet grace is never alone but you’re saved by grace alone through faith alone. Faith is never alone for it is always evidenced by works but you’re not saved by your works. You’re saved by grace alone through faith alone because it’s by grace that you’re given faith in Christ alone. Therein is your salvation and God has done this for His glory alone to the praise of His glorious grace but how did Luther find that out? He found it through Sola Scriptura. It was the Scripture alone that became his rule of faith and practice. It wasn’t the counsels, the traditions or the creeds as valuable as those would be. He rooted everything in that which was revealed in God’s Word and he stepped up to the cathedral doors in Wittenberg and nailed 95 theses. The result was the power of the state came against him and the Holy Roman Empire under Charles the V. The power of the church came against him under Leo the X, having corrupted the Gospel, the cleric and everything but it all came against him.

That ought to remind you of something. What are you hearing here? In our series of contending and defending the faith we pointed out that Satan has two strategies. One is the strategy of intimidation against the Christian and the church and the other strategy is infiltration. Many times in intimidation Satan uses the cultural elite and specifically

the state and there came the state against Martin Luther to silence him. Would Luther do what he was called to do? The Scriptures called him to contend and defend the faith. Here was the state coming with intimidation and the church had been infiltrated with false teaching and false teachers.

Then he rose up in 1519 at that place in Wittenberg to defend the faith against the state that came against him. He was defending without defensiveness but with determination and diligence. Then to the church he would contend for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints without contentiousness but with courage, conviction and clarity. That is what we have been studying and it's amazing as we come to this moment today so that we can take a look at it but it was all rooted in his ability to see sola gratia, sola fide, sola Cristas, soli deo Gloria and was all coming from sola scriptura. It was the Scripture that he has immersed himself in and it was that, that had sustained him.

I think that's where we are today. I am a man who does not like to defend anything. I am into denial. I would rather bury my head in the sand but believe me those subpoenas that went out to those five pastors in Houston were not to get their sermons. I know those pastors and if you want their sermons all you have to do is go to their websites and download them. It was a subpoena and it was a state attempting to sanitize itself of religion particularly when it comes against the agenda of the state and that subpoena was nothing but intimidation. Will we contend and will we defend? The answer is found in whether we know the Scriptures. Are they seen as true and will we hold fast to them or will we be intimidated into silence or will we allow syncretism to filter into the church to rob us of the glorious truth of the Gospel of grace and all of its implications for eternity and life?

I believe that key is met right here in this text. I never use the phrase 'hell on earth' because I don't think it ever happened but once and that was at Mount Calvary. That's when hell fell upon earth as hell fell upon Jesus who took up the wrath of God for all the sins of all of His people that we might be saved for all eternity. Here is another thing that happened. Here is another mountain where heaven came down to earth. Do you think you could count all the hymns and songs that have been written about hell on earth at Calvary? They are all over the place. Go find me a transfiguration hymn.

It is really exciting what the Lord is doing in some of these ministries particularly in light of what is facing us as we move into the future with the intimidation of the cultural elite and the state and with the infiltration of the church so that we don't really know the Word that is supposed to inform our minds and shape our lives and hearts so we can stand firm and finish the race. We want to do this by faith but you can't do it except by faith and faith comes from hearing the Word. So we are brought to this moment as Jesus is headed from Mount Hermon at Caesarea Philippi.

He had just made this great declaration to these people at Caesarea Philippi that you must come after Him and to follow Him you have to be willing to die in order to live. It's not your dying that saves you but His dying that saves you but when you come to Him by faith you die to yourself and live unto Him. So are you ready to give it all for Me because I gave it all for you and I have given you all because of what I have done on the cross. So He has given them these lessons on discipleship and it's interesting to note that the disciples didn't speak of this event until after the resurrection and it's recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Matthew and Mark say this event happened six days after Jesus speaking at Caesarea Philippi and Luke says eight days and of course people think there is an error in the Bible but no. Luke is counting the day He said it, the six days of travel and then the eighth day of when the transfiguration happened. Matthew and Mark are just referring to the six days of travel to getting from Mount Hermon back down to the Sea of Galilee where the mountain was where the transfiguration took place. So the occasion is a prayer retreat. This is not unusual for Jesus had led prayer retreats before with Peter, James and John and in fact He'll do another one at the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This prayer retreat is going to end up differently. This is not the normal one that is taking place. It starts out as an assembly of four – Jesus, Peter, James and John. It will move to six and end up with seven. As they have come to this occasion something they see happens and Matthew and Mark use the Greek word *metamorphoo* for our word metamorphous where a change takes place. Luke describes it from the outside where His appearance had been altered. This One, the glory of the Lord that had come, Christ, veiled in flesh at least partially, the veil is removed. Now we see Him in all of His glory and the glory is so astounding that His clothes literally in the language are beyond bleached. They are beyond any description that the writer can come up with. They see Him not only transformed in glory as heaven has come down and glory is filling the place but as they are there watching Him in all His majesty behold the assembly of four now becomes six. There also in glory are Moses and Elijah.

What happens next? It is a conversation. They begin to have a discussion with Jesus about His departure that was to be accomplished. It is kind of unusual language used here. Honey, did you succeed in leaving the house today? The word used for departure here is the word we get exodus from. Do you think Moses knew something about exodus? He had a dry run on what was about to happen. He had, had a preliminary preview of what was pointing to what was about to take place in the exodus that Jesus is about to accomplish – not the deliverance of people from the bondage of human slavery but the deliverance of humans from the bondage of slavery to sin. That is the deliverance He is about to accomplish. I would have loved to have listened to this conversation that was going on between Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

I like the way one preacher said it. He said here are some mountain men. At Mount Carmel Elijah gets taken up in a chariot. At Mount Sinai Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock requesting to see glory and he was able at that time to see the back side as the Hand hid him in the cleft of the rock. Now he is on another mountain with the Cleft, the Rock and the Hand right there beside him. Here are Moses and Elijah and they are ready. How do I know this was all planned? It is because you're seeing Moses and Elijah in glorified bodies. Those who die in this world go to an intermediate state before they get their glorified bodies but Moses and Elijah in this passage already have glorified bodies so they skipped the intermediate state.

I believe God knew this moment was coming so after Moses died Jude tells us that He sent Michael the Archangel to get the body of Moses and Michael entered into warfare with Satan in order to raise up the body of Moses. He did it because He had a job for Moses and it will be in a glorified body. You have an appointment with the One whom you have been pointing people to, the one Prophet greater than you. He didn't even let Elijah die for He put him in the chariot and brought him home. So, both are

equipped for another task that was put before them. Elijah is over the prophets. Moses is over the law. They give Him under their leadership the Old Testament and now they are standing beside the One whom the Old Testament points to and God has sovereignly prepared the moment by already having their bodies available.

Then they move from the conversation with Jesus to what then takes place which is the consecration. Luke 9:32-36 says [32] *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. [33] And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. [34] As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. [35] And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" [36] And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone (sola Cristas). And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.*

So why did this cloud bring such awe upon them? This was the cloud that had led them out of Egypt. This was the cloud that had led them through the Red Sea. This was the cloud on Mount Sinai. This was the cloud that came into the Tent of Meeting. This was the cloud that filled the Holy of Holies. This was the cloud that came upon Mary that she would bear a Son and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth. This is The Cloud, the Shekinah Glory of God has now come.

Peter, we're not building shrines. This is My Son. He has already done it once before at His baptism. This is My Son in whom I am well pleased. Now God says it again. This is My Son. This is the Messiah. This is the Chosen One. Listen to Him! Then Moses and Elijah, you're done, go and enjoy eternity. Then Peter, James and John see Jesus alone and they come back down. What do we want to get from this?

I want to give you three things and then I'll get to the main one. The first one I have called mountain top. As a pastor I do not encourage you to live your Christian life by looking to mountain top experiences because what goes up is going to come down. I have asked the Lord to increasingly allow me to step by step to grow in grace everyday – faith upon faith upon faith. Having said that, God does design mountain top experiences and He brings them for a reason. He brings mountain top experiences because it's what you need to go into the valley to serve Him. The Lord will always prepare you to do what He has called you to do.

Peter, James and John are going to go to three more mountains. They are going to go from this mountain to the Mount of Olives and they'll see this same Jesus make a prayer request of His Father and the answer is going to be 'no'. It is when Jesus says "Father if there is any way this cup can pass from Me" and the Father will say "No Son, You are the Way. You will drink the cup to the bottom." They will see Him in His supplication. They will see Him with His capillaries bursting and blood mingled with His sweat. They will see Him calling out in agony because He knows where He is headed and the Lord is preparing them on the Mount of Transfiguration to be there in that moment.

He will go to Mount Calvary and there He will be forsaken. There the same God of glory and grace who has said twice 'this is My Son in whom I'm well pleased' on that mountain will turn from Him and pour His wrath upon Him. Jesus will say "My God,

My God why has Thou forsaken Me” and they will have run from that moment but they are prepared now to understand that His humiliation because of His exaltation and in anticipation of another mountain where He will ascend back to glory, back to the Mount of Olives after His resurrection. What they are about to face on the mountains of humiliation, in supplication in the garden of Gethsemane, and the crucifixion at Calvary, He is preparing them by letting them see the Lord of glory in His transfiguration and His exaltation. The Lord will bring in your life for what is yet to face you.

The second thing is the supreme thing of God’s help. It’s no accident that Moses and Elijah were there in their glorified bodies but Moses is there representing the Law and Elijah is there representing the prophets. These two men have done their work and everything in the Old Testament is pointing to Christ. In fact after the resurrection Jesus is going to be on the road to Emmaus and says to the two disciples there “Oh you slow of heart did you not know that the Messiah must suffer, die and be raised on the third day?” Beginning with Moses and all the prophets (Elijah) He explained Himself in all the Scriptures. Moses and Elijah are there because God’s revealed Word to that point is all there to point to Jesus. Peter, James and John are there as the Apostles and there the Apostles will write the exposition of Jesus your New Testament. That’s why when they are done Peter, James and John are humbled, Moses and Elijah are gone and Jesus is alone, sola Cristas. Jesus alone is our Redeemer and Savior.

Thirdly, is an uncomfortable comfort. Whenever a pastor tells you that, it’s probably more uncomfortable than comfort but I’ll try to give you some comfort through an uncomfortable comfort. How could you possibly go to sleep Peter, James and John? In fact you’ll do it again later. I’m going to try and get them off the hook for you. I think this is taking some time. This is revival and revival is exhilarating and exhausting yet even in their exhilaration and exhaustion as they come out of the exhaustion they don’t want it to end. So let me ask you, did you pray for revival today or maybe just a little bit of it because you have to get to lunch? Perhaps we can slip out a little early because we need to get to the games.

I have been in one revival in my life and it was in Uganda in 1986. I watched my dear brothers and sisters climb a mountain to an All Saints Cathedral which was a bombed out building. We stood in the blazing African sun and we sung and sung and sung. Then they said “Preacher, preach” and I preached for an hour. I finished and gave the benediction and then said “The Lord bless you” and dismissed them. The bishop stood up and said “Don’t go anywhere, preacher get some rest for we’re going to sing some more and you’re going to preach some more.” We sung and I stood up and preached some more. I got to the end again, gave the benediction, sat down and the bishop said “Preach again.” I started looking through my Bible looking for another sermon somewhere. The revivals of East and Central Africa have been there 35 years and they are still going on. There is a reason Uganda is different today than everything around it and it’s because of the God-sent revivals.

When God sends revival people don’t want to go anywhere. I think when we pray for revival I think what we’re wanting is just a little pick-me-up and then by the way could You kind of get our country on track a little bit? Revivals are consuming, exhausting and exhilarating.

Now here’s the comfort. Even in the best of moments, with the best of intentions, the best of us say stupid things and you can count on Peter to give us the illustration.

“Hey, this is great and I do not want this to end, ring the bell!” You’ve got it Peter. Let’s build three shrines for Peter wants to turn this into a mountain top conference center. First of all Peter, you never build shrines for Moses, Elijah and Jesus for there is only One who is enshrined upon our praise and that is Jesus. You appreciate the servants of the Lord but there is only One who is worshipped. You don’t put anyone up to, in front of or above Jesus. It is Jesus alone. Secondly, I’m not giving you this to stay on the mountaintop for I’m giving you revival to get you ready for the race to be won and the ground to be held to contend and defend. That’s why the cloud comes and says “You’ve seen His glory, now listen to Him.”

So here is your takeaway. *Sola Scriptura* – the voice of God the Father calls us to listen intentionally to the voice of God the Son, our Lord and Savior. The cloud comes, the Father speaks, listen to Him. The Him is My Son, your Lord and Savior so listen to Him. Here is the Word incarnate. He is giving you the Word to read it. Listen to Him. You can’t get converted without listening to Him. Romans 10:13-14 says [13] *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. You can’t be converted, strengthened, encouraged, convicted, shaped, get a Christian mind, life or heart without hearing His voice and His Word. You would never know *sola gratia* (grace), *sola fide* (faith), *sola Cristas* (Christ) or salvation without the Book.

Martin Luther would have never known it and he’d still be in religious tradition and superstition without the Book for it was the Book that brought him to Christ. It was the Book that shaped his thinking. It was the Book that shaped his life in the hands of the Spirit of God as it fixed him from the voice of Christ upon Christ alone. It was the Book that did it to the glory of God.

As we prayed about this the overwhelming response of our elders to next year’s ministry theme is the sanctity, supremacy and sufficiency of Scripture. That’s why it’s going to be there because you can’t converted, equipped, encouraged, corrected, directed, framed or formed without it.

That’s why after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses two years later the long arm of the state brought him with its subpoena and put him at the Diet of Worms and the arm of the church came in its corruption – the intimidator being infiltrated under Leo the X. They asked Luther “Did you teach this salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone by the authority of God’s Word alone to the glory of God alone? We love God’s Word but the church stands equal. Its ritual will save you.” Luther said “No” and faltered under the intimidation by asking for one more day. He went home and prayed “God, I don’t have the strength because the Word can never be embraced without the Holy Spirit coming through intercessory prayer.” Luther called upon the Holy Spirit and the next day as he stood before the emissaries of the state and church he said “Unless I’m convinced by Scripture and clear reasoning my conscience is bound by Scripture captive to the Word of God, here I stand for I can do no other.”

The movement was ignited that spread to the martyrs blood soaking the earth – a Nicholas Ridley, a Hugh Latimer, the life blood of John Knox given right from the pulpit, John Calvin gave himself until he was finally throwing up with blood from the pulpit with all of his heart and soul for the Reformation. We know not of all the hundreds of

missionaries in France that lost their lives among the Huguenots. We know not of all in Scotland under Bloody Mary but we do know what the Queen Mary said. She dreaded the black robes of the Reformers more than any other army that existed.

A movement out of that Reformation led to a Gospel Awakening that then jumped over the Atlantic that gave us a country with its imperfections but the influence of the power of the Gospel becoming almost a 600 year movement and yet we now see that which was soaked by the blood of the martyrs that which was carried around by the missionaries like Jim Elliot to places like South America and beyond. That movement ignited in that moment contending and defending the faith, the Scripture, holds me captive. Now will it hold us captive?

Will we be intimidated into silence or will we exalt the Gospel of glory? Will we contend for marriage which reflects His glory? Will we contend for Biblical sexuality which is a gift He has given to us? Will we contend for the sanctity of the family and life? It is all because of our Master and Lord. You just have to put up with us. We are captive for our consciences are bound. We can do no other. Here we stand and then we'll finish the race. It matters not what the culture says or what they do – the false teaching that has infiltrated the church, the wolves that would seek to devour – but we would stand by God's grace for His glory because that Word has captivated our conscience.

Our Savior from this mountain will go to another mountain. He will give us His Word. He will save us from our sins. Our life is not ours for it is His and the glory of the Lord must be declared. Let the subpoenas come. Let the mocking continue. We will contend to win the argument and win the false teacher. We will defend to stand firm and win the opponent that they may be brought to Christ because the voice of the Lord has given us our life by the power of the Spirit. Here we stand for we can do no other.

Brothers and sisters, I am not a prophet or the son of a prophet but we are in desperate need. All of us that want to reach the nations are in desperate need of a Gospel Awakening in this nation and we won't have it until there is an exhausting, exhilarating revival in the church and we won't have that until there is a reformation in pulpit and pew. Thy Word is truth! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the glorious privilege to declare our hearts before You, hearts that You have given to us and our minds to You that we want You to renew and transform. Thank You Father that You have said what Your Son had already affirmed to Mary and Martha. Jesus said "Martha you're concerned about so many things but only one thing is necessary and Mary has chosen the best. Sit and listen to the Word of the Lord." So Father I want to pray for these Your people. First, anyone reading this that has not yet come to Mount Calvary, may the Mount of Transfiguration of glory send them to the mountain of humiliation where the Lord of glory saves us from our sins and may they trust in Him alone. Dear friend, come to Christ. He will come out of that grave to the Mount of Olives and what Elijah had in a chariot was nothing compared to what happened that day as He ascended and Him coming again. Be found on that Day in Christ. Father, until that Day send us to the secret closet of prayer and the Word that we may listen to the voice of our Savior as we study the Word. Send us into our small groups to listen to the

voice of the Savior as we dialogue, grow and be discipled from God's Word. Send us into the fellowship as we share God's Word with one another. Send us O God into the worship services where we sing, pray, confess and hear that Word. Send us faithful preachers who will preach that Word and not to tickle ears but to preach the Word loving You and loving people with the truth. O God help us intentionally to listen to the voice of Your Son, our Savior and Lord, for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.