

EDITORIAL

A New Ninety-Five Theses on Scripture

PETER A. LILLBACK

October 31, 2017

1. The church is always in need of reforming according to the Word of God if it is to remain the Christian church.
2. A program for reforming the church requires a reaffirmation of *sola Scriptura*.
3. The church's way of reading and understanding Scripture must be formed by Scripture itself, with Scripture interpreting Scripture.
4. Postmodern rejections of Scripture's story line propose substitute narratives based on an a priori rejection of the divine inspiration of Scripture.
5. Postmodern methods of biblical interpretation reject *sola Scriptura* and replace it with a biblically alien system of hermeneutics.
6. The Scriptures offer assurance and confident hope, whereas postmodern interpretations are self-focused, resulting in relativism, uncertainty, and narcissism.
7. The interpretation of Scripture is not ultimately governed by the beliefs of a community, but rather by Scripture interpreting Scripture. Without this standard, the message of Scripture is relativized, resulting in ambiguity, and theological and spiritual chaos.
8. The rule of faith of Scripture compared with Scripture and Scripture interpreting Scripture is an objective standard for truth claims, meaningful discourse, and theological accountability.
9. Confessional orthodoxy is relevant and must be taken into account in biblical and theological interpretation.
10. No church confession is infallible, as this is true of Scripture alone.

11. Confessions should be read and subscribed to with a heart commitment, while understanding that they are standards subordinate to the Scriptures.
12. Confessional subscription is to be “as far as confessions are Scriptural” and not “because they are Scriptural,” since no human document can claim to equal the unique inerrant and authoritative character of the inspired Word of God.
13. The church must reaffirm the foundational properties of Scripture as revealed, inspired, inerrant, infallible, necessary, perspicuous, authoritative, unified, self-authenticating, immutable, and canonical.
14. Scripture is known because God revealed himself and intended his self-revelation to be preserved in writing.
15. These writings were given in the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), which are to be used as the basis for authoritative translation and interpretation.
16. While the Scriptures have been and must be translated into the vernaculars used by Christians worldwide, the study of Scripture in the original languages must be maintained, encouraged, and not considered superfluous for the life of the church.
17. The Scriptures are not merely human documents that become the word of God when preached or when the Holy Spirit inspires the hearts of believers with the living voice of the gospel.
18. The Scriptures are human documents that are inspired by God the Holy Spirit and preserved by his providence. They are the living voice of God (*viva vox Dei*), and fallible human preaching, enabled by the regenerating and illuminating of the Spirit’s unction, is the living voice of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*).
19. The Scriptures in their original form (the autographs) no longer exist, although they were given through the inspiration of the authors by the Holy Spirit, so that the written words are infallible and without error.
20. Copies of the originals are so numerous and well preserved that the essential form of the originals can be known, studied, and used authoritatively for the well-being of the church.
21. Through the gospel and biblical teaching, the Scriptures created the church, which by providence and the Spirit’s guidance has been enabled to recognize the canonical Scriptures that have blessed it for nearly two millennia.
22. The canon is not a construct the church has foisted on human documents, but it was inherent in the giving of the inspired divine Word from Old Testament times, continuing into the New Testament era.

23. The so-called gnostic gospels and pseudepigraphic writings were never part of the church's canon. They appeared as a challenge to the church through an amalgam of Greek mystery religions and philosophy.
24. The canon reflects the mind of God focused on the person and work of Christ, promised in the old covenant and fulfilled in the new. It was delivered either by divinely chosen, inspired, and providentially enabled prophets and apostles or by those under their oversight, and so the inspired canonical documents were inscripturated.
25. The Scriptures cannot fail or cease to exist, as they are infallible, and as the inspired Word of God, they cannot deceive. As they reflect the eternal mind of God in revealed form, they possess a property of eternity.
26. The Scriptures cannot err in what they intend to teach in their original inspired form. The nature of God's truthfulness, omniscience, eternity, immutability, and saving goodness are inherent in the Scriptures in the human words superintended by God the Holy Spirit.
27. Because God's incommunicable attributes include eternity, infinity, and immutable perfection, the deposit of Scriptural truth carries with it the nature of a predestined text that is eternal and cannot pass away. It thus teaches, in this world and the next, the truths of God's nature and the work in Christ for his chosen people, united to Christ.
28. Disagreements in biblical interpretation exist, as we do not have all the historical, theological, and scientific data needed to fully understand what Scripture affirms. Nevertheless, the church's commitment to inerrancy is an expression of faith in what the Scriptures, as the revealed word of God, declare about God and themselves.
29. The Scriptures are inspired as a revelation of God's saving will and are necessary for the church's life and gospel ministry and also its ethic of love for God and neighbor.
30. The Scriptures are vast in scope, meaning, and mystery, and cannot be fathomed by mortal minds. However, as the essential truth of God's nature, mankind's sin, redemption, and faith and life in Christ, they are perspicuous in what they intend to teach.
31. Because the Scriptures are true, inspired, necessary, and essentially clear, all people should have them in their own languages and be taught to read, study, and apply them for their salvation and practical benefit.
32. The establishment of an elite body of interpreters takes away the right of believers to read and study the Scriptures and constitutes a restriction and denial of the perspicuity of Scripture.
33. Because the Scriptures are revealed by God and given through inspiration, they are the sole authority for believers' salvation, life, and practice of faith.

34. Attempts to diminish the authority of Scripture through philosophy, science, worldviews, higher or lower criticisms, human ideologies, papal encyclicals, councils and synods of churches, human erudition, or mystical intuitions are to be rejected as a denial of the foundational principle of *sola Scriptura*.
35. While the church's interpretation of the history of redemption has been characterized by various types of hermeneutics, no system of interpretation that rejects the unified character of God's plan of salvation in the person and work of Christ can be accepted as biblical or Christian.
36. The unity of the Bible's saving message in Christ prioritizes Scripture's references to covenant and to the saving declaration of God, "I will be your God and you will be my people," which runs through the canon of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.
37. As a written document, the Scriptures can be studied and compared with other documents for discussion and learning. However, understanding the Scriptures is ultimately possible because of their self-authenticating character, since the Holy Spirit, who inspired the text and its authors, illumines the minds of readers and hearers.
38. The Scriptures as written are intended not only to be read personally, but also to be read corporately and aloud because of the differing ways the Spirit blesses his people through visual and oral learning.
39. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Scriptures as God's Word are eternal, and the people of God will learn their truths throughout eternity as they increase in their understanding of the grace of God in Christ.
40. God's written Word developed over time with the history of redemption and as its canonical stature grew. However, having reached canonical fullness in the New Testament, the earthly expression of the Scriptures is complete.
41. The reading and understanding of the true sense of the Scriptures is beyond the unregenerate reader, since God's truths are spiritually discerned and illumined only by the inner regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.
42. Collective reading and interpreting of the Scriptures is a profitable task, as no prophecy is given for private interpretation, and the wisdom of the Spirit is not imparted to only one generation of the church.
43. Commentaries written through the ages are useful for interpreting Scripture and for students of the written Word, in subordination to the Scriptures themselves.
44. There is no infallible hierarchy in church or academy for the development of the Scriptures' meaning or biblical doctrine.

45. The Scriptures were not given as a systematic theology, but are a dramatic expression of salvation history that can best be unified in a Christ-centered reading, in light of the unfolding of God's covenant of grace.
46. The interpretation of Scripture should be conducted with careful consideration of historical setting and authorial intent, with attention to the author's words, grammar, syntax, and immediate and broader contexts, and in light of the fullness of the canon, with an eye for how all these point to the Messiah and his redemptive work.
47. Multiple translations of the Scriptures are helpful and should be read in comparison with each other.
48. No historical setting of the written Scriptures (such as Second Temple Judaism, ancient Near Eastern religion, or primitive Catholicism) can have authority in interpreting the Scriptures over against the teaching of the Scriptures themselves.
49. Interpreters, councils, creeds, and magisterial announcements and pronouncements can be considered binding only in light of the written Word of God.
50. Difficult passages of Scripture must be interpreted in light of the clearer passages, with due humility, recognizing that some problems of interpretation will not be resolved in this earthly stage of the church's ministry.
51. Alleged contradictions or inconsistencies of Scripture are recognized as allegations, and efforts should be made to resolve tensions. If these are not resolvable, the church and interpreters are to assume an attitude of trusting faith, awaiting further evidence and greater light provided by the Holy Spirit's ministry to the church in the present or to the people of God in the coming age.
52. Scripture should be mastered, memorized, meditated upon, applied, and consulted as the circumstances of each believer enable.
53. The meaning of Scripture is generally singular, although it may have both an immediate sense and a long-term christological sense, as well as a variety of applications for the people of God throughout the ages of the church.
54. The history of revelation was given in prescientific and non notarial form, so it is not intended to be read as a text of science, a juridical record, or a scholarly statement of human history. There is, nevertheless, in Scripture's teaching scientific truth, accurate reporting, and true history.
55. A facet of the genius of divine revelation is that as the Word of God written, Scripture reflects a timeless message for all people in all civilizations and times, and it will ever be true, wise, useful, and saving, regardless of progress in finite human knowledge.

56. The creation accounts present the truth of God's role in all things, focusing on the who and why of creation, rather than the how or the when.
57. Mystery is present in all of Scripture so that many questions asked of Scripture will remain unanswered, awaiting God's fuller revelation in the coming ages.
58. Reason is a ministerial tool in interpreting the Scriptures. God is a God of order and truth who calls on his people to reason with him, as the Scriptures employ logical constructions of all sorts. Nevertheless, reason alone is an inadequate tool to address the full message of the Scriptures, which is spiritually discerned.
59. The Spirit's movement in the thought, word choices, and personalities of the authors of Scripture was not by mere dictation; the inspired written word of God retains the distinctive style and personality of the authors.
60. The distinctive theological foci of the biblical authors are not an expression of pluralism, but rather complementary emphases inspired by one and the same Spirit.
61. The spoken words of Jesus recorded in the Gospels are not attempts of the early church to create a Jesus of faith as a substitute for the Jesus of history. They are the verbally inspired and providentially preserved oral accounts of the gospel ministry of Jesus, sovereignly recorded by divine superintendence for the spiritual health of the church.
62. The distinctive themes of the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel are complementary, not contradictory, reflecting the unique purposes of the authors and their perspectives, looking forward to or looking back from Pentecost.
63. The juridical themes of Paul concerning justification by faith are not contradictory to but covenantally consistent with Paul's experiential doctrine of union with Christ.
64. While Second Temple Judaism may be summarized as covenantal nomism, the Old Testament doctrine of the law in the covenant can never be separated from God's gracious work in divine election and mercy in forgiving grace.
65. Messianic revelation in the Old Testament is mysterious and progressive but not contradictory to or inconsistent with its culmination in New Testament revelation.
66. The interpretation of the history of salvation in the Scriptures is best expressed as organic Christ-centered revelation moving toward Christ as its goal, and outward from Christ as salvation is accomplished in him.
67. A christocentric hermeneutic reflects the direct teachings of Jesus and is supported by the New Testament use of the Old Testament.

68. The Old Testament messianic revelation is christomorphic, not explicitly messianic, reflecting the shape of redemption in Christ as part of God's plan of salvation.
69. Efforts to demythologize the Scriptures are an overt rejection of biblical revelation and a patent declaration that they are not the written Word of God.
70. The Scriptures may be interpreted by contrasting law and gospel when the saving call of the gospel is in view. However, when the Christian life is under consideration, law and gospel are best understood as the double grace of justification and sanctification (the *duplex gratiae*) in the new covenant, sometimes described as law in grace.
71. When the law is written on the heart of the believer in the new covenant, the inner law is a reflection of the revealed law of God in the Scriptures, summarized in the moral law of the Ten Commandments and Jesus's two Great Commandments.
72. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* re-establishes the great summary mottoes of the Protestant Reformation.
73. *Sola Scriptura* as a doctrine and method of hermeneutics leads to *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, *solī Deo gloria*, and the priesthood of believers.
74. The Scriptures celebrate and inculcate salvation by God's grace alone, denying any human merit and rejecting the semi-Pelagian covenantal nomism suggested by some versions of the New Perspective on Paul.
75. The Scriptures hold forth the unique saving work of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the types of the Old Testament, by the explicit work of redemption accomplished by Christ, and by the apostolic affirmations of Christ as the exclusive redemptive way to God, of the sole saving name of Christ, and of the Lord's final and unique mediatorial role.
76. While the Scriptures call for obedience to God and highlight the necessity of keeping the law of God, the sinner's hope of salvation is found in the instrument of faith alone for justification.
77. The message of salvation in the Scriptures shows that justification is by faith alone, but that the faith that justifies is never alone and is always accompanied by God's saving graces contained in the covenant and experienced by union with Christ.
78. The continuing sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church confirms its continued commitment to merit, even though there has been a declaration of a common commitment with Lutherans in *sola gratia*.

79. While ecumenical dialogue has its place and offers some practical social benefits, all efforts at the ecumenical integration of Christian churches must be rejected if they do not first proceed from a clear commitment to *sola Scriptura*.
80. The Scriptures insist on the theocentric doxological purpose of the church and prohibit all efforts to elevate any mere human into a place of worship, whether it be Mary, saints, apostles, popes, or martyrs.
81. The Scriptures do not give the church the ability to set the day, the time, the hour or the season of the second advent of Christ, and efforts to overcome this godly eschatological agnosticism are theological hubris and spiritual and ministerial folly.
82. The interpretation of biblical eschatology must not overlook its realized expression in the person and work of Christ, especially in his death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.
83. The eschatology of Scripture must not be interpreted as exhaustively fulfilled in Christ's first advent. It is well described by the "already but not yet" character of the coming of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.
84. The Scriptures teach that the Second Adam was from heaven and became a life-giving Spirit, whereas the First Adam from the earth was a man of dust with the spirit of life divinely imparted to him.
85. The Scriptures maintain that the First Adam failed and through covenant breaking brought the curse of sin and death upon humanity; the Last Adam has brought the blessings of forgiveness and life for God's people through keeping the covenant of grace. There shall never be any other after him, neither any false messiah, nor Muhammad, nor any other teacher proposed by human religions.
86. The Scriptures teach that the Last Adam is also the Second Adam, meaning that he fulfills the duties that Adam failed to do and that there is no other between the First and the Last Adam who was able to do what Christ alone did, neither Moses, nor David, nor the prophets.
87. The Scriptures provide a structure for interpreting the history of salvation presented in the Bible through the contrast between the First and the Last or Second Adam.
88. Contemporary efforts of the emergent church movement to focus on feelings, social justice, and teachings acceptable to culture, at the expense of the authority, necessity, and clarity of Scripture, offer a false gospel and make idols of cultural immediacy, denying the eternal validity of the faith once delivered to the saints in the Scriptures.
89. The public and corporate nature of the church is taught by Scripture, but to interpret the New Testament as seeking only to create a new

corporate community of Jews and Gentiles denies the personal necessity of faith and repentance taught by the Scriptures.

90. The quest to integrate various fields of human knowledge with the Scriptures is a legitimate task, but the insights of Scripture and Scripture's authoritative role in the development of disciplines such as law, history, psychology, science, philosophy, and sociology must not be overlooked, diminished, or denied.
91. The Christian's world and life view is to be developed from Scripture and demonstrated to be compatible with biblical teaching.
92. The Bible's affirmations of the supernatural and the miraculous power of God are an integral part of an authentic Christian perspective on reality. Denial of miracle destroys the fabric of revealed truth.
93. The unique role of the charismatic gifts and the miraculous events of Scripture are best interpreted in what has been called the periodicity of miracles.
94. Some current expressions of what some claim to be charismatic gifts are inconsistent with the Scriptures' description and diminish the significance of the completion of the canon of Scripture that made revelatory gifts no longer essential for the church.
95. The abuse of such gifts implies that the authority of gifts has been placed over the authority of the Scriptures and creates an autonomous source of alleged revelation that either overlooks or denies biblical authority.