

The Doctrine of ‘Sola Scriptura’



Someone wrote me posing the following questions regarding the authority of the Scriptures. My reply follows...

“Can you show me in the Scriptures authoritatively where the Bible is our sole authority as believers (as opposed to oral tradition or being ‘led by the Spirit’)? Or, Biblically prove Sola Scriptura?”

Well, we must begin by defining the doctrine under discussion. And let me begin by defining what the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* does not say.

First of all, it is not a claim that the Bible contains all knowledge. The Bible is not exhaustive in every detail. John 21:25 speaks to the fact that there are many things that *Jesus* said and did that are not recorded in John, or in fact in any book in the world because the whole books of the world could not contain it. But the Bible does not have to be exhaustive to function as the sole rule of faith for the Church. We do not need to know the color of Thomas' eyes. We do not need to know the menu of each meal of the Apostolic band for the Scriptures to function as the sole rule of faith for the Church.

Secondly, it is not a denial of the Church's authority to teach God's truth. *I Timothy 3:15* describes the Church as *"the pillar and foundation of the truth."* The truth is in *Jesus Christ* and in His Word. The Church teaches truth and calls men to Christ and, in so doing, functions as the pillar and foundation thereof. The Church does not add revelation or rule over Scripture. The Church being the bride of Christ, listens to the Word of Christ, which is found in God-breathed Scripture.

Thirdly, it is not a denial that God's Word has been spoken. Apostolic preaching was authoritative in and of itself. Yet, the Apostles proved their message from Scripture, as we see in Acts 17:2, and 18:28, and Jesus commended those in Ephesus for testing those who claimed to be Apostles in Revelation 2:2. The Apostles were not afraid to demonstrate the consistency between their teaching and the Old Testament.

And, finally, *Sola Scriptura* is not a denial of the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and enlightening the Church.

What then is *Sola Scriptura*? The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, simply stated, is that the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone are sufficient to function as the *regula fide*, the "rule of faith" for the Church. All that one must believe to be a Christian is found in Scripture and in no other source. That which is not found in Scripture is not binding upon the Christian conscience. To be more specific, the Scriptures are not in need of any supplement. Their authority comes from their nature as God-breathed revelation. Their authority is not dependent upon man, Church or council. The Scriptures are self-consistent, self-interpreting, and self-authenticating. The Christian Church looks at the Scriptures as the only and sufficient rule of faith and the Church is always subject to the Word, and is constantly reformed thereby.

Now, the question we must answer is, "can a Biblical argument be provided for the belief in the sole sufficiency of the Scriptures to govern the life of the believer?" What does the Bible say? Is the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* found in God's Word? *Indeed, it is...*

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Revelation 19:13 *And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.*

Jesus and the *Word* are synonymous, they are one and the same. This is clearly and irrefutably taught throughout the Bible (Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 1:1, 5:7). This eternal truth has often been summarized as the person of *Jesus* is the Living Word, while the Scriptures are the Written Word. Now, the question must be posed, "how much authority does *Jesus* have in the life of the believer? Or, how much authority does *Jesus* have in shaping life, doctrine, and practice in His church?" I assume any professing Christian must confess, "*He has all authority*". Indeed. With my first premise in mind (*Jesus and the Word are synonymous*), we must logically conclude that the Scriptures have the same amount of authority as *Jesus*. Any reasonable man, upon acknowledging this Biblical absolute, must either forsake his satanic accusations against the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, or by implication, undermine the Lordship of Christ.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *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.*

Again, I realize some may reply, "2 Timothy 3:16-17 doesn't say the Bible is all sufficient in and of itself." Frankly, such an argument seems futile, if not intellectually dishonest. 2 Tim 3:17 teaches that the Scriptures were inspired that we might be "**perfect**" (Strong's: *artios*; complete) and "**thoroughly furnished**" (Strong's: *ex-ar-tid'-zo*; to finish out; figurative to equip fully) unto **all good works.**" This is strong language indeed. If this does not prove *Sola Scriptura* then there are no verses in the Bible that will. Who would be so bold as to declare that the Scriptures lack the authority to make men perfect, complete, and equipped for every good work when God explicitly says otherwise?

Matthew 4:1-11 (for the sake of space, I will not include the text).

Three times *Jesus* was tempted by the Devil and each time *Jesus* replied with the words, "*It is written*". If anyone could have used oral tradition, it was *Jesus*, yet he chose the only safe and sure way to defeat Satan: Scripture.

1 Corinthians 4:6 *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*

There is much to say regarding this verse, however, I will attempt to be brief. The larger context of 1 Cor 4:6 is in a section of 1 Corinthians we call, "preacheritus" (Chapters 1-4). The church was beginning to follow men rather than scripture. These four chapters are a contextual unit. We connect Mt 16:18 + 1 Cor 1:10-13 + 1 Cor 3:5-17 + 1 Cor 4:6. "upon this rock I will build My church" Mt 16:18 + "as a wise masterbuilder...but let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." (1 Cor 3:10) "...I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written" (1 Cor 4:6) Paul did not say, "These things are to teach you not to exceed my oral teachings." Instead the emphasis is on showing the supremacy of scripture over oral tradition. What makes this even more powerful is the fact that in 54 AD, only a few of the New Testament books were written, yet the church was still warned to abide within the scripture she had. In the time of transition (50 - 96 AD) between 100% oral (30- 50 AD) and 100% written (96 AD - present), we find the highest standard is written. This is especially troubling to Catholics (and others who esteem oral tradition equal to/above the Scriptures) who erroneously claim the church did not have the Scriptures until the 4th century.

Acts 17:11-12 *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily,*

whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

It is true, the Apostles were inspired with genuine oral revelation, however, they always directed people to the Scriptures for the final determination of truth. Oral tradition is worthless without the witness of Scripture.

Jesus never referred to oral tradition to prove or defend truth. Nor does *Jesus* often refer to oral traditions in a positive way. Moreover, every time He defends truth he refers to the Scriptures. In fact, *Jesus* condemned the corrupt oral traditions of His day. For example...

Matthew 15:9 *But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Matthew 15:3 *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*

Mark 7:8-9 *For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men...And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*

Mark 7:13 *Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition...*

Jesus made over 100 references to Scripture. *Jesus* never, not even once, appeals to oral tradition to validate truth, but constantly referred to the Scriptures.

Matthew 12:3 *...Have ye not read what David did*

Matthew 21:42 *Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures...*

Perhaps we should wisely follow *Jesus'* pattern instead of succumbing to corrupted religious systems with their arrogant and carnal reasoning.

Colossians 2:8 *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 (the Word).*

–B.W.

