

The Doctrine of ‘Sola Scriptura’



A Catholic 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...*

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

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

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*). Ironically, it also is acknowledged by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.¹ 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.

¹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 3, Part I, sections 101-103, pg 30.

“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.”

—2 Timothy 3:16-17

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 and conclusive 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?

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” —Matthew 4:1-11

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*.

“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.”

—1 Corinthians 4:6

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.

“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.” —Acts 17:11-12

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*. According to the Bible, belief in and adherence to the *Scriptures*, not *oral tradition*, is the sole foundation for *faith in Christ*, a safeguard against *theological heresy*, assurance of *eternal life*, and *spiritual blessings*.

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” —John 20:30-31

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets...” —Acts 24:14

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” —1 John 5:13

*“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”
—Revelation 1:3*

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...

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

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

“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 7:8-9

“Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition...” —Mark 7:13

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.

“...Have ye not read what David did” —Matthew 12:3

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

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

“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).” —Colossians 2:8

Finally, the *Catholic Church* in her *Catechism*², clearly asserts the *Scriptures* to be both *inspired by God* as well as *inerrant*.

“God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. ‘To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.’ The inspired books teach the truth. ‘Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.’”³

This declaration presents a rather precarious philosophical conundrum for *Rome* and it’s insidious and blatant lies promoting *Papal authority* and *Church tradition*. By acknowledging, as they should, that *God* is immutable⁴ and cannot lie⁵ and that the *Bible*, which is *God’s Word*, is both perfect and inerrant—it stands to reason that any *tradition* or *Papal declaration* (i.e., *ex cathedra*) that contradicts the *Scriptures* cannot be true. God cannot contradict Himself. It is a demonstratable fact that much *Catholic doctrine* has *no basis in* or is plainly *contrary* to *Scripture*. This is without argument. Thus, by *Catholicism*’s official declaration of the nature of the *Scriptures*, they essentially condemn all their extra-biblical doctrine.

—B.W.

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² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 3, Part II, sections 105-107, pg 31.

³ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 3, Part II, sections 105-107, pg 31.

⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part I, Section II, Chapter I, 212, pg 58.

⁵ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part I, Section I, Chapter 3, 157, pg 40.

