

Know Your Faith

Session 2 – Sola Scriptura

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
V. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.

R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

A preliminary note on translations: NIV, KJV, NAB, RSV

“Can we agree that the Bible is our sole authority?”

“Where is that in the Bible?”

What is *Sola Scriptura*?

- The doctrine that the Bible alone is the supreme, infallible authority and rule of faith for the Christian.
- “All things necessary for salvation and concerning faith and life are taught in the Bible clearly enough for the ordinary believer to find it there and understand it” (Robert Godfrey, “What Do We Mean by *Sola Scriptura*” in Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible).
- Rejects Sacred Tradition and the teaching authority of the Church
 - The importance of the issue**
 - The “formal principle” of the Reformation
 - From this principle stems nearly all the other differences between Catholics and Protestants
 - It is the question of *authority*. Where is apostolic teaching preserved today? From what source do we derive our certainty for our most important beliefs? To what do we appeal when differences and questions arise?

The Catholic position

- “Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed.”

Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence” (Dei Verbum, 9).

- “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.... But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (Dei Verbum, 10).

***Sola Scriptura* is unbiblical.**

Self-contradictory

- If the Bible alone is the supreme, infallible authority and rule of faith for the Christian, then that should be taught in the Bible. Just as if I say, “All sentences should begin with the letter “G,” – that sentence itself doesn’t begin with “G”, so is non-sense – it’s false.
- Where is *Sola Scriptura* taught in the Bible? Nowhere.

Verses used to support *Sola Scriptura*

- 2 Timothy 3:14-17 – “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed [inspired] and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (New International Version)
 1. “All scripture” is inspired; not: “only scripture” is inspired. “All honey is sweet” does not equal “Only honey is sweet,” or far less, “sugar is not sweet.”
 2. That which is “useful” or “profitable” (KJV) is not necessarily sufficient. “Steady hands are useful for being a good surgeon.” This does not mean that there is nothing else necessary to be a good surgeon (education, experience, etc.), or that steady hands are sufficient for being a good surgeon.
 3. A parallel verse: James 1:4 - “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (NIV). “Patience” in the KJV and NKJV. If 1 Tim 3:16-17 teaches *sola scriptura*, does James teach *sola* perseverance, or *sola* patience? Do we not, then, need faith, hope, love, etc. to be perfected?
 4. This, if it proved *Sola Scriptura*, would prove too much. What scriptures did Timothy know “from infancy” (v. 15)? Only the Old Testament. If this proved *Sola Scriptura*, it could only refer to the OT, thereby excluding the entire New Testament. Even allowing for some of the NT, not all the books of the NT had been composed by the time Paul was writing to Timothy. As a proof for *Sola Scriptura*, this would exclude *at least* the later books of the Bible from consideration as inspired rules of Faith.

5. If verses 15-16 speak of the necessity and benefit of scriptures, verse 14 supports the idea of Tradition – “continue in what you have learned and have been convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it...”

“Tradition” condemned?

- Matthew 15:3 (Parallel Mark 7:9) – “Jesus replied, ‘And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?’” (NIV) (*Paradosin*)
 1. Context, context, context!
 2. Jesus was not condemning all traditions across the board, only those that made God’s word void. Here, the Pharisees supposedly dedicated their goods to the Temple so they could avoid supporting their aged parents. So doing, they nullified the commandment to “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12).
 3. Elsewhere, Jesus taught his followers to follow the traditions that are not contrary to God’s commandments. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice” (Matt. 23:2–3).
- Colossians 2:8 – “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (NIV). (*Paradoseis*)
 1. The fallacy is to see the word “tradition” in Matthew 15:3 or Colossians 2:8 or elsewhere and conclude that anything termed a “tradition” is to be rejected. Jesus did not condemn all traditions; he condemned erroneous traditions that undermined truth.

Verses in support of Tradition

- 2 Thessalonians 2:15 – “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter” (NIV). “Traditions” in the KJV. (*Paradoseis*)
 1. That which is handed down by letter (in writing) – Scripture
 2. That which is handed down by word of mouth – Tradition
 3. The two are commanded to be held to with equal weight, with no distinction of authority
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6 - “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (NIV). “Tradition” in the KJV. (*Paradosin*)
 1. Those who do not hold to the traditions handed on by apostolic authority (Paul) are to be shunned!

- 1 Corinthians 11:2 – “I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you” (NIV). “Ordinances” in the KJV. (*Paradoseis*)
- 2 Timothy 2:2 – “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (NIV).
 1. The apostolic authority of oral Tradition does not end with the Apostles. It is to be handed on to the next generation.
 2. "Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. . . . Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (Clement's *Letter to the Corinthians* 42:4–5, 44:1–3 [A.D. 80]).
 3. "[I]t is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the infallible charism of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession.... " (ibid., 4:26:2).
- Matthew 23:1-3 – “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. “So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach” (NIV).
 1. Where is Moses' seat mentioned in scripture? Nowhere. Jesus is commanding adherence to an extra-Biblical tradition.
- 1 Timothy 3:15 – “...if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is **the church** of the living God, **the pillar and foundation of the truth**” (NIV).

***Sola Scriptura* is unhistorical.**

1. Christianity predates the writing and canonization of the Bible. What was the rule of faith for Christians before the Bible? What happened to that authority?
2. Heretics from early times have appealed to the so-called plain meaning of scripture. What is the rule of faith to arbitrate between competing interpretations of Christian doctrine all appealing to the same Bible?

The problem of the Canon

- The 27 books of the NT were penned from about 50-100 AD. Catholics and Protestants agree on this list (canon) of books. Who determined the NT canon of inspired books? The Bible did not drop from Heaven bound.
- One cannot determine the *scriptura* on the basis of *Sola Scriptura*.
- There is no “inspired Table of Contents.” Nowhere does the Bible tell us what books should be in the Bible.
- Therefore, if we believe we can trust each and every book and we are not lacking any books, what authority *outside the Bible* was responsible for determining infallibly the canon of scripture?
 - Until the canon was decided, there was much debate. Some held that canonical books like Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter, and Revelation were NOT canonical. Others held that The Shepherd of Hermas, the Gospel of Peter, and the letters of Barnabas and Clement were inspired.
 - Pope Damasus, prompted by the Council of Rome, wrote a decree listing the 73 books of the OT and NT canon in 382.
 - The Council of Hippo in North Africa approved the same list of 73 books in 393.
 - The Council of Carthage approved the same canon in 397.
 - Pope Innocent I approved the 73-book canon in 405, closing the canon of the Bible.
 - **The Catholic Church, through her Popes and Councils, determined the canon of the Bible.**
 - Augustine: “I would put no faith in the Gospels unless the authority of the Catholic Church directed me to do so” (Against the Letter of Mani, 5, 6).
 - Martin Luther: “We are obliged to yield many things to the Papists – that they possess the Word of God which we received from them, otherwise we should have known nothing at all about it” (Commentary on St. John, chapter 16).
 - The Church did not make the books inspired; the Holy Spirit did. The Church did, however, make it possible for us to have assurance as to which books these were.
 - **To trust the Bible is to trust the authority of the Church which guarantees the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* is contradictory in accepting the Bible and rejecting the authority of the Church which gave us the Bible.**
- The Bible CANNOT be self-authenticating
 - Why, based on scripture alone, do we believe the Bible to be inspired at all?
 - Because the Bible claims to be (2 Tim 3:16-17)? Other books claim to be inspired. If I wrote a book and made the claim of inspiration in its pages, that confirms nothing.
 - Because it is “inspiring?” What is inspiring about legal code in Leviticus? The book of Philemon? But I do find the Acts of the

Martyrdom of St. Perpetua inspiring. This proves nothing about inspiration, though.

- Because the Holy Spirit confirms it in me? What about those early Christians who debated which books were inspired? What about Martin Luther who removed 7 books from the OT and wished to do the same with James in the NT?
- **We know the Bible is inspired because of the authority of the Catholic Church. This is an authority outside the Bible, and thus refutes *Sola Scriptura*.**

Historical perspective on the question - The Church Fathers

- "It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times, men who neither knew nor taught anything like what these heretics rave about... For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men" (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3:3:1 [A.D. 189]).
- "Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth, so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. . . . For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant conversation, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question?" (ibid., 3:4:1).
- "As I said before, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although she is disseminated throughout the whole world, yet guarded it, as if she occupied but one house. She likewise believes these things just as if she had but one soul and one and the same heart; and harmoniously she proclaims them and teaches them and hands them down, as if she possessed but one mouth. For, while the languages of the world are diverse, nevertheless, the authority of the tradition is one and the same" (*Against Heresies* 1:10:2 [A.D. 189]).
- "That is why it is surely necessary to avoid them [heretics], while cherishing with the utmost diligence the things pertaining to the Church, and to lay hold of the tradition of truth. . . . What if the apostles had not in fact left writings to us? Would it not be necessary to follow the order of tradition, which was handed down to those to whom they entrusted the churches?" (ibid., 3:4:1).
- "Although there are many who believe that they themselves hold to the teachings of Christ, there are yet some among them who think differently from their predecessors. The teaching of the Church has indeed been

handed down through an order of succession from the apostles and remains in the churches even to the present time. That alone is to be believed as the truth which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition" (Origin, *The Fundamental Doctrines* 1:2 [A.D. 225]).

- **"Of the dogmas and messages preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the apostles, handed on to us in mystery. In respect to piety, both are of the same force. No one will contradict any of these, no one, at any rate, who is even moderately versed in matters ecclesiastical. Indeed, were we to try to reject unwritten customs as having no great authority, we would unwittingly injure the gospel in its vitals"** (St. Basil, *The Holy Spirit* 27:66 [A.D. 375]).
- "[T]he custom [of not rebaptizing converts] . . . may be supposed to have had its origin in apostolic tradition, just as there are many things which are observed by the whole Church, and therefore are fairly held to have been enjoined by the apostles, which yet are not mentioned in their writings" (Augustine, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists* 5:23[31] [A.D. 400]).
- "But in regard to those observances which we carefully attend and which the whole world keeps, and which derive not from Scripture but from Tradition, we are given to understand that they are recommended and ordained to be kept, either by the apostles themselves or by plenary [ecumenical] councils, the authority of which is quite vital in the Church" (Augustine, *Letter to Januarius* [A.D. 400]).
- **"[Paul commands,] 'Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or by our letter' [2 Thess. 2:15]. From this it is clear that they did not hand down everything by letter, but there is much also that was not written. Like that which was written, the unwritten too is worthy of belief. So let us regard the tradition of the Church also as worthy of belief. Is it a tradition? Seek no further"** (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Thessalonians* [A.D. 402]).

***Sola Scriptura* is impractical.**

The problem of interpretation

- "She didn't fax the letter to the CEO about your salary."
- 2 Peter 3:15-16 – "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (NIV).
- Acts 8:27-31 – "So he [Philip] started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch. . . . This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." ³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading

Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him" (NIV).

- **Material and Formal Sufficiency**
 - The Catholic *could* say that the Bible is “materially” sufficient – all the “stuff” we need is in there in some way.
 - But it is not “formally” sufficient. Some other reality is needed to interpret, or “give form to” the material of the Bible.
 - Documents need living, continuing authorities to guard, guarantee, and **officially interpret it**. US Constitution: Supreme Court.

Unity and Division

- Individual interpretation of scripture results in a subjectivist approach to Christian doctrine.
- Lacking a sure, living guide to interpreting the scriptures, disagreements result in divisions and the multiplication of “denominations.” (33,000?)
- John 17:23 – “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (NIV).

Conclusions

ASK:

1. Where is the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* taught in the Bible?
2. Where does the Bible, the sole rule of faith, teach what books should be in the Bible?
3. Where did the Bible come from? What authority put it together? Could they have gotten it wrong? What happened to that infallible authority?
4. How do you know the Bible is inspired?
5. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 – (“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”) - What does Paul mean by “word of mouth?” How does *sola scriptura* hold to these teachings?
6. What is the pillar and foundation of truth? Then point to 1 Timothy 3:15 – “...if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (NIV). If the Bible is the sole supreme authority for Christian truth, why does the Bible point to the Church to fulfill that role?
7. Point out some of the early Church Fathers’ statements on the topic. Ask why, if this is such a central element of the Christian faith, so many early Christian leaders failed to acknowledge it.

Know Your Faith Revised Calendar

- February 8th – The Bible Alone? (Chapel)
- February 15th – Are you Saved? Are you Born Again? (Chapel)
- February 22nd – The Eucharist (Social Hall)
- March 1st – No Session; Join us For Dr. McNamara's Presentation in the MC Chapel
- March 8th – Confession (Social Hall)
- March 15th – No Session; Parish Mission
- March 22nd – Purgatory (Zuker Hall)
- March 29th – The Papacy (Zuker Hall)
- April 5th – No Session; Easter Monday
- April 12th – Mary (Zuker Hall)