

SOLA SCRIPTURA

Protestant Position The doctrine of “Sola Scriptura” claims that the *Bible alone* is the authority in matters of faith. Basically, all true doctrines are to be found in the Bible. If the Bible doesn’t mention, it cannot be a true doctrine. This has always been the basis for objections against doctrines such as purgatory, saints and Mary.

Catholic Position Christ left a Church to teach, govern, and sanctify in His name until the end of time. The Bible is accepted as an authority in matters of faith because it is God’s inspired Word. However, it is not the *only* rule of faith. Instead it works hand in hand with sacred traditions and the magisterium. Although some apostolic traditions are not found in Scripture, they do not contradict the Bible.

FOR SOLA SCRIPTURA

“Look at John 20:31, and 2 Timothy 3:16–17! It says the Bible is all we need!”

The verse from John’s Gospel tells us only that the Bible was composed so we can be helped to believe Jesus is the Messiah. It does not claim that the Bible is all we need. The same can be said about 2 Timothy 3:16–17. To say that *all* inspired writings “has its uses” is one thing; to say that such a remark means that *only* inspired writing need be followed is something else. Moreover, the previous verse 3:15 shows that Paul is describing the Old Testament scriptures, and if the argument proved anything, it would prove too much, that the New Testament were not necessary for a rule of faith.

“But, read Acts 17:11. The Bereans took the Scriptures as their sole authority.”

What really happened is that these people first had been taught Christianity orally and now checked to see if its claims matched the Old Testament prophecies. The verse does not at all mean one uses the Bible as a checklist for all Christian doctrines. As a matter of fact, if the Bereans had stuck to the Torah (“Torah alone”) like what the Jews in Thessalonica did (Acts 17:1–9), they might have rejected Paul’s additional revelation.

“Even Jesus told us to search the Scriptures for the truth in John 5:39.”

It is taken out of context. Jesus was not saying: “Get your Bible and verify that all Christian truths can be discovered in the plain sense of the text.” Instead, he was pointing out to the Pharisees that the messianic prophecies were fulfilled in him. “If you read Scripture, you can verify this for yourselves!” The verse cannot be stretched to mean that all religious truth can be found on the surface of the Bible.

AGAINST SOLA SCRIPTURA

It goes against *logic*... If sola scriptura is true, i.e. all truths of faith can be found in the Bible, then logically the doctrine itself should be mentioned in the Bible. However, nowhere in the Bible supports the claim. Simply, the belief contradicts itself.

It goes against the *Bible*... The Bible actually denies that it is the complete rule of faith. John tells us that not everything concerning Christ's work is in scripture (John 21:25). Paul also reminds us several times that sacred tradition is to be followed alongside sacred scripture (2 Tim 1:13, 2:2; 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6). Actually, in Acts 20:35, Paul records a saying of Jesus that is not found in the Gospels, but from the oral teachings at his time.

It goes against *common sense*... God would never have left a written document to be the only rule of faith without a living authority to guard and officially interpret it. Peter reminds us that it is dangerous to put the Bible on private interpretations (2 Peter 1:20, 3:15-16). The Bible, while meant to be read by individual Christians, indicates that a divinely appointed guide is needed to get through treacherous passages. Today there are tens of thousands of competing denominations, each claiming to go by sola scriptura and insisting its interpretation of the Bible is the correct one. However, no two of them agree exactly what the Bible means. The Holy Spirit cannot be the author of such confusion (1 Cor 14:33). God cannot lead people to contradictory beliefs because His truth is one. The doctrine simply produces more divisions and does not work.

It goes against *history*... We need the authority of the Church (magisterium) to tell us what belongs to the Bible. The Church needs the apostolic traditions as reference to determine what is and is not scripture. Once the canon is compiled, the Church is obliged to follow and safeguard the teachings of the Bible. Throughout history, *the scriptures, the traditions and the magisterium* are equally important to our faith. The belief that apostolic traditions are as important as apostolic writings was upheld by the Church Fathers in the first 4 centuries, including Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine, to name a few.

Sola Scriptura was unheard of for 1500 years until... when the reformers rejected the papacy. In doing that they also rejected the teaching authority of the Church. They looked elsewhere for the rule of faith, but they had no place else to look except the Bible. By default, the interpretation of the Bible would be left to the individual, as guided by the Holy Spirit. But as we saw, it only sparked more divisions.

READINGS

Catholic Questions: Apologetics Backward (*This Rock, October 2001*)
 Poorly Versed (*This Rock, January 2000*)

Further Research

- If you ask a Protestant friend, "What is the pillar and foundation of the truth?" what are they likely to answer? What does the Bible give as the answer? (See 1 Timothy 3:15)
- Although the Bible is not the sole rule of faith, do you think that your fellow Catholics are not treating the Bible as a rule of faith with the same enthusiasm as your fellow Christians do?