

Why the Scripture alone (“Sola Scriptura”) doctrine is wrong?

Introduction: The Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura* ("Scripture alone") holds that every point of Christian theology-everything pertaining to "faith and practice"-must be verifiable from the Bible alone. This is expressed by the old Protestant slogan "What is not biblical is not theological". "Scripture is the only infallible rule for faith and practice" -- hence, all "churches" and any "traditions" (today) are fallible.(Greg Krehbiel).They argue that theology must be done without allowing Tradition or a Magisterium (teaching authority) to have binding authority in how Scripture is to be interpreted. Thus, according to *sola scriptura*, any role that Tradition, a Magisterium, Bible commentaries, or anything else may play in theology should do no more than suggest interpretations and evidence to the believer as he makes his decision. Each individual is put in the position of being his own theologian. It is the failure to prohibit the right of private judgment from the part of church leadership that has resulted in 30,000 different Protestant churches divided over questions concerning mostly basic doctrines of Christian beliefs, while there is only one Holy Catholic Church.

Arguments disproving the “Scripture alone” doctrine:

- 1) Practical problems: The *Sola scriptura theory* presupposes (1) the existence of the printing press, (2) the universal distribution of Bibles, (3) a cash-based economy, (4) universal literacy, (5) the universal possession of scholarly support materials, (6) the universal possession of adequate time for study, and (7) a universal education in a high level of critical thinking skills. If “Scripture alone theory” is correct, how can we explain the faith and salvation of millions of Christians who did not have a personal copy of the Bible till the 16th century because printing was not in existence and only synagogues and rich people and big Christian communities possessed hand written copies of the Bible. They believed that their pastors and teachers gave them correct teaching of the word of God. Even the priests and preachers in the first half of the first century did not have any New Testament books. It took a few centuries for the early Church to fix the number of inspired books in the New Testament. Even the final version of the Jewish Canon of the Old Testament was finally fixed in the first century AD. Even after printed Bibles became available in the 16th century in important European languages, the vast majority of common people were illiterate and Christians in other countries did not have translations of the Bible in their languages. Personal interpretation required knowledge of original languages of the Bible or at least dictionaries and commentaries. They were not available for ordinary people. The *sola scriptura* presupposes the universal possession of adequate leisure time in which to make a thorough study the Bible for oneself. But the hard working common people had to do so many other things on Sundays other than Bible study. *Sola scriptura* also presupposes a high level of universal education in critical thinking skills-in ordinary people , which does not exist in the average college student today. All these practical difficulties prove that *sola scriptura* is not God's plan.

2) Holy Scripture itself disproves "Scripture alone" theory: No biblical passage teaches that Scripture is the formal authority or rule of faith in isolation from the Church and Tradition. *Sola scriptura* can't even be deduced from implicit passages in the Holy Scripture. On the other hand, it mandates the use of tradition. This fact alone disproves *sola Scriptura*. Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15 - those that preached the Gospel to all creation but did not write the Gospel were not less obedient to Jesus, or their teachings less important. Matt. 28:20 - "observe ALL I have commanded," but, as we see in John 20:30; 21:25, not ALL Jesus taught is in Scripture. So there must be things outside of Scripture that we must observe. This disproves "Bible alone" theology. Mark 16:15 - Jesus commands the apostles to "preach," not write, and only three apostles wrote. The others who did not write were not less faithful to Jesus, because Jesus gave them no directive to write. There is no evidence in the Bible or elsewhere that Jesus intended the Bible to be sole authority of the Christian faith. Luke 1:1-4 - Luke acknowledges that the faithful have already received the teachings of Christ, and is writing his Gospel only so that they "realize the certainty of the teachings you have received." Luke writes to verify the oral tradition they already received. John 20:30; 21:25 - Jesus did many other things not written in the Scriptures. These have been preserved through the oral apostolic tradition and they are equally a part of the Deposit of Faith. (Cfr also: Acts 8:30-31; Heb. 5:12; Acts 15:1-14 ; Acts 17:28 ; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 1 Cor. 11:2; Phil. 4:9 ; Col. 4:16 ; 1 Thess. 2:13 ; 1 Thess. 3:10 2 Thess. 2:14 ; Thess. 2:15 ; 2 Thess 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Tim. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:14; James 4:5; 2 Peter 1:20 2 Peter 3:15-16 2 Peter 3:16 1 John 4:1 1 Sam. 3:1-9 1 Kings 13:1-32).

3) Jesus and Paul Accepted Non-Biblical Oral and Written Traditions: The Protestants defending *sola scriptura* will claim that Jesus and Paul accepted the authority of the Old Testament. This is true, but they also appealed to other authority outside of written revelation. For example:

- a) The reference to "*He shall be called a Nazarene*" cannot be found in the Old Testament, yet it was "*spoken by the prophets*" (Matt. 2:23). Therefore, this prophecy, which is considered to be "God's word," was passed down orally rather than through Scripture.
- b) In Matthew 23:2-3, Jesus teaches that the scribes and Pharisees have a legitimate, binding authority based "on Moses' seat," but this phrase or idea cannot be found anywhere in the Old Testament. It is found in the (originally oral) Mishnah, which teaches a sort of "teaching succession" from Moses on down.
- c) In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul refers to a rock that "followed" the Jews through the Sinai wilderness. The Old Testament says nothing about such miraculous movement. But rabbinic tradition does.
- d) "As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses" (2 Tim. 3:8). These two men cannot be found in the related Old Testament passage (Ex. 7:8ff.) or anywhere else in the Old Testament.

4) Old Testament Jews did not Believe in *Sola Scriptura*. To give two examples from the Old Testament itself:

- a) Ezra, a priest and scribe, studied the Jewish law and taught it to Israel, and his authority was binding under pain of imprisonment, banishment, loss of

goods, and even death (cf. Ezra 7:26). **b)** In Nehemiah 8:3, Ezra reads the Law of Moses to the people in Jerusalem. In verse 7 we find thirteen Levites who assisted Ezra and helped the people to understand the law. Much earlier, we find Levites exercising the same function (cf. 2 Chr. 17:8–9). So the people did indeed understand the law (cf. Neh. 8:8, 12), but not without much assistance—not merely upon hearing. Likewise, the Bible is not altogether clear in and of itself but requires the aid of teachers who are more familiar with biblical styles and Hebrew idiom, background, context, exegesis and cross-reference, hermeneutical principles, original languages, etc. The Old Testament, then, teaches about a binding Tradition and need for authoritative interpreters, as does the New Testament (cfr. Mark 4:33–34; Acts 8:30–31; 2 Pet. 1:20; 3:16).

5) The apostles exercised authority at the Council of Jerusalem: In the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:6–30), we see Peter and James speaking with authority. This Council makes an authoritative pronouncement (citing the Holy Spirit) that was binding on all Christians: "*For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity*" (Acts 15:28–29). In the next chapter, we read that Paul, Timothy, and Silas were traveling around "through the cities," and Scripture says that "they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4).

6) Tradition is not a dirty word: Protestants often quote the verses in the Bible where corrupt traditions of men are condemned (e.g., Matt. 15:2–6; Mark 7:8–13; Col. 2:8). Of course, Catholics agree with this. But it's not the whole truth. True, apostolic Tradition also is endorsed positively. This Tradition is in total harmony with and consistent with Scripture. When Catholics speak of 'tradition' we are referring to a body of teaching which is formed by the experience of the Church. A body of teaching which is at once ancient and yet fresh and alive. Within the living apostolic tradition of the Catholic Church we can find a rock-solid, sure, historic and unified body of teaching which illuminates and interprets the Bible without fail.

7) Pharisees, Sadducees, and oral, extra biblical Tradition: The Sadducees rejected all authoritative oral teaching and essentially believed in *sola scriptura*. They did not believe in life after death, angels etc. But Christianity was derived in many ways from the Pharisaical tradition of Judaism. They were the theological liberals of that time. The Pharisees, despite their corruptions and excesses, were the mainstream Jewish tradition, and both Jesus and Paul acknowledge this. So neither the orthodox Old Testament Jews nor the early Church was guided by the principle of *sola scriptura*.

8) Ephesians chapter 4 refutes the Protestant "Proof Text:" "*All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in*

righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This passage doesn't teach formal sufficiency, which excludes a binding, authoritative role for Tradition and Church. If 2 Timothy 3 proves the sole sufficiency of Scripture, then, by analogy, Ephesians 4: 11-15 would likewise prove the sufficiency of pastors and teachers for the attainment of Christian perfection. The Church and Scripture are both equally necessary and important for teaching.

9) *Sola Scriptura* Is a circular position: When all is said and done, Protestants who accept *sola scriptura* as their rule of faith appeal to the Bible. If they are asked why one should believe in their particular denominational teaching rather than another, each will appeal to "the Bible's clear teaching." Often they act as if they have no tradition that guides their own interpretation. This is similar to people on two sides of a constitutional debate both saying, "Well, we go by what the Constitution says, whereas you guys don't." The U.S. Constitution, like the Bible, is not sufficient in and of itself to resolve differing interpretations. Judges and courts are necessary, and their decrees are legally binding. Supreme Court rulings cannot be overturned except by a future ruling or constitutional amendment. In any event, there is always a final appeal that settles the matter. But Protestantism lacks this because it appeals to a logically self-defeating principle and a book that must be interpreted by human beings. Obviously, given the divisions in Protestantism, simply "going to the Bible" hasn't worked. In the end, a person has no assurance or certainty in the Protestant system. They can only "go to the Bible" themselves and perhaps come up with another doctrinal version of some disputed doctrine to add to the list. The only conclusion we can reach from the Bible is what we call the "three-legged stool": Bible, Church, and Tradition are all necessary to arrive at truth. If you knock out any leg of a three-legged stool, it collapses.