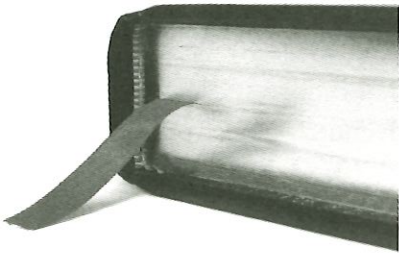


Sola Scriptura

LESSON 7



Topic

Authority for faith and practice

Theme

God has no other authority for faith and practice besides the written Word of God.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will understand why the Bible alone should determine our faith and practice.

Materials

- Resource 8
- Visual 3

Scripture Focus

Deut. 4:2; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Matt. 4:1–11; 15:1–9; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16, 17; Rev. 22:18, 19

Summary

This lesson will look at two views concerning the authority of Scripture. It will then present Biblical evidence for *sola scriptura*.

Outline

I. Views on the Authority of Scripture

- A. Sola scriptura
- B. Scripture plus tradition

II. Biblical Evidence for Sola Scriptura

- A. Bible's basis for faith and practice
- B. Jesus' rebuke of Pharisaical tradition
- C. Bible's warnings about changing Scripture
- D. Inclusion of apostolic writings in the Canon
- E. God's commands concerning revelation
- F. Bible's perspicuity

Memory Verse

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14, 15).

GETTING STARTED

Intriguing Sights and Sounds

Play a video from the Web of a portion of a Catholic or Eastern Orthodox mass. Point out the formalism, symbolism, and liturgy.

ASK: What is your response when you see a high church service or mass?

ASK: How intrigued are you by the sights and sounds of the service?

Among evangelicals there is a growing intrigue with high church formalism, symbolism, and liturgy. This lesson will help us see past the sights and sounds of the high church service to consider why the Bible alone should be the basis of our faith and practice.

Stunning Display

Display visual 3 to show high church architecture and design.

ASK: Does high church architecture and design appeal to you? (Q1)

ASK: Why might someone think that such symbolism and design are signs of authenticity? (Q2)

Among evangelicals there is a growing intrigue with high church formalism, symbolism, and liturgy. This lesson will help us see past the visual appeal of the high church architecture and design to consider why the Bible alone should be the basis of our faith and practice.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Views on the Authority of Scripture

The previous lesson examined the importance of the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. This lesson will examine just what we should expect the Holy Spirit to illuminate. Some believe that the Bible is not our only source of authority and that the Spirit uses other sources to inform us on faith and practice.

A. *Sola scriptura*

The Latin phrase *sola scriptura* means *by Scripture alone*. The phrase is a way of stating that the Bible alone should determine our faith and practice. So those who hold to *sola scriptura* believe the Bible is the sole authority for what they believe and how they practice those beliefs. This lesson will give Biblical support for *sola scriptura*, a doctrine that has been under attack since the days of the apostles.

B. Scripture plus tradition

The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are the most prominent religions to add authoritative sources to the Bible. Both have a collection of writings from the church fathers, historical pronouncements, and official proclamations on

Kenneth R. Guidon's book called *High Church Heresy* is an excellent resource for exposing resurgent Catholicism and Orthodoxy. It is available from RegularBaptistBooks.com.

doctrine. They call this collection their Tradition. They consider their Tradition as an authority equal to the Bible and consider it a means for better understanding the Bible. They believe their Tradition came from the oral teachings of Christ and the apostles and that God entrusted them with keeping that Tradition.

Furthermore, Catholics believe that God gave them *magisterium*, which they define as the divinely appointed authority to teach the truths of religion. Essentially the Catholic Church tells its followers what they are supposed to believe and do in order to be faithful to God. *Solemn magisterium* includes formal definitions by councils or popes. *Ordinary magisterium* includes the church's teachings on faith and morals. Exercising *magisterium* has resulted in many of the documents that make up Catholic Tradition. Overall, both the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches believe they have the supreme authority to interpret the written Word of God and Tradition. Historically, members of their churches have not been encouraged to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Their leadership has the responsibility to tell them what the Bible says.

II. Biblical Evidence for *Sola Scriptura*

A growing number of evangelicals are turning to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox religions. They are intrigued by the liturgy, formality, and rituals. They feel the high church experience is more authentic and brings them closer to God. Furthermore, the high church doctrine appears more authoritative and true since both churches claim they are the successors to the apostolic church. But high church doctrine is not simply another viable option. It is actually deceptive and destructive. It is important for us as believers to understand the Biblical evidence for *sola scriptura*. Such an understanding helps us see that God provides all the truth we need in His written Word. The Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice. The high church experience is ultimately empty formalism that steers people away from God.

A. Bible's basis for faith and practice

The Bible's own testimony makes it clear that no other document or person is needed to establish God's truth for us. Second Timothy 3:16 is the central passage for establishing *sola scriptura*.

READ: 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. **ASK:** What key words in these verses demonstrate that the Bible is sufficient for the believer? (Q3) *All, thoroughly, all.*

God-breathed Scripture is sufficient for equipping the believer for every good work. And while *Scripture* in 2 Timothy 3:16 technically refers to the Old Testament, the New Testament is also called *Scripture* (2 Pet. 3:15, 16; 1 Tim. 5:18). Second Timothy 3:16 and 17 is essentially teaching that *all* of the Bible is inspired and sufficient. There is therefore no need for a second authority that has been passed down orally or otherwise.

B. Jesus' rebuke of Pharisaical tradition

Furthermore, Jesus set Scripture above all other sources of authority, including the authority claimed by the Pharisees of His day (Matt. 15:1–9). The Pharisees

believed they had received their tradition from Moses, supposedly making it as authoritative as the Scriptures Moses wrote. They complained that Jesus' disciples weren't following their traditions concerning ceremonial handwashing. In response, Jesus reproved the Pharisees, pointing out that they used their *tradition* to make the *commandment of God of none effect* (15:6). Instead of obeying Moses' written law and honoring their parents by caring for them (15:4; cf. Exod. 20:12; 21:17), they vowed to give all of their money as a gift to God (Matt. 15:5). In accordance with their traditions, the money was no longer theirs; they could not give any of it to help their needy parents. And even if they regretted gifting their money to God, they were required to keep their vow according to Moses' written law (Num. 30:2). In reality, the Pharisees were simply looking for a way to keep their money and use it as they wished so they wouldn't have to take care of their parents. They used their tradition to create a loophole around God's written Word.

The tradition the Pharisees appealed to is similar in nature to the tradition the Catholic and Orthodox churches appeal to today. All three are outside the Bible and all of them are or were used to reinterpret and even void the Bible. Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders of His day could be appropriately applied to Catholic and Orthodox historical and present religious leaders.

In contrast to Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisaical tradition is His recognition of the Old Testament as the final and supreme authority. Jesus used the Old Testament when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11). That Jesus quoted Scripture in one of His most intense experiences on earth is noteworthy. It shows the importance of Scripture as well as its power.

READ: Matt. 4:1–11. **ASK:** What was the result of Christ's use of Scripture to combat Satan's temptations? (Q4) *Jesus resisted temptation and defeated Satan.*

In all, Jesus and the apostles quoted from or referred to the Old Testament nearly one hundred times. They repeatedly referred to that which was *written* (Mark 7:6, 7; 14:27; Rom. 3:4, 10). The *written* Word of God was authoritative for them. Eventually their use of the Old Testament also became part of God's Word when it was included in the inspired New Testament, leaving for us a testimony of the authority and sufficiency of the Bible.

C. Bible's warnings about changing Scripture

Building off Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees, the Bible directly addresses attempts to change the written Word of God. Catholic and Orthodox traditions are essentially additions to the Word of God.

READ: Deuteronomy 4:2. **ASK:** What did Moses warn concerning the commands God gave through him? (Q5) *Nothing was to be added to or subtracted from the commands.*

Agur wrote that the Word of God's pureness is like that of a perfectly refined metal (Prov. 30:5).

READ: Proverbs 30:5, 6. **ASK:** What would be true of the person who tried to add to God's Word? (Q6) *He would be rebuked by God and found to be a liar.*

Jesus carried out Proverbs 30: 5 and 6 when He rebuked the Pharisees.

The apostle Paul wrote to Corinth to tell them that they needed to stick with what the Scriptures say and not to develop their own standards by which to judge men (1 Cor. 4:6). John was even more emphatic in his warning that closed out the book of Revelation (Rev. 22:18, 19).

READ: Revelation 22:18, 19. **ASK:** How serious was John's warning? (Q7)

Serious enough that he listed eternal consequences for those who attempt to change the Scriptures.

John said that those who add to the book would experience the plagues recorded in the book and that those who take away from the book would not experience the blessings recorded therein. The warning essentially says that changing God's Word is evidence that a person has rejected God. No one who rejects God will experience the joys of Heaven.

Many Catholics and Orthodox Christians are trusting in their works to earn grace for salvation. They are basing that trust on doctrines that are in turn based on traditions outside of God's Word. Catholics and Orthodox Christians have rejected God's Word and His way of salvation. They are still lost in their sins. For an Evangelical to join them in their false doctrine is truly bad news for them. For how will they know they are lost if Evangelicals are joining their ranks?

D. Inclusion of apostolic writings in the Canon

The clear warnings about adding to or subtracting from Scripture applied to the apostles too. Just because God communicated the New Testament through them didn't give them the authority to write something on their own and claim it as Scripture. In fact, none of them did that. Their inspired writings were recorded as Scripture and eventually recognized as part the New Testament Canon. But there were no further writings or oral traditions that emerged from the first century apostles that were later recognized as authoritative additions to the completed New Testament. Every apostle obeyed God's instructions about not adding to the Word of God as evidenced by the fact that they didn't have any additional writings that they thought should be a part of the Word of God.

We should note that the New Testament does talk about *traditions* from the apostles. Their teachings and writings made up their traditions, but not everything they said or wrote was considered God's inspired Word. They spoke authoritatively because they had been ordained by God as leaders in the establishment of Christ's church (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20). The apostle Paul even told believers to *keep* the traditions (1 Cor. 11:2) and *hold* them (2 Thess. 2:15). As mentioned, what is the inspired Word of God was recorded and eventually recognized as such. *Tradition* was a general term for describing what the apostles taught and passed down. When they died, their authority lived on in the inspired books they wrote. Nothing else they said or wrote was perpetuated as inspired. There is nothing missing from our New Testament. It is complete and sufficient for us.

READ: John 20:30; 21:25. **ASK:** What was John's testimony concerning the record of all that Christ said and did? (Q8) *Only a small fraction of what Jesus said and did was actually recorded as Scripture.*

Certainly everything Jesus taught was perfectly true and worth knowing. But most of it was not recorded in the Bible. Yet we aren't lacking anything God wanted us to know about Christ actions and teachings. The same is true of the apostles. The Canon includes all they said and taught that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and necessary for us to have today.

E. God's commands concerning revelation

A *written* Word was God's plan all along. We find many times throughout the Bible that He commanded His Word to be written down. Conversely, we don't find similar commands for God's Word to be kept as an oral tradition and left unwritten. It simply doesn't make any sense for God to leave part of His authoritative Scripture in an unwritten form.

READ: Deuteronomy 31:26. **ASK:** What was done with Moses' Book of the Law before he died? (Q9) *It was placed for safekeeping and future reference in the ark of the covenant.*

READ: Joshua 24:25, 26. **ASK:** Why was it important for Joshua to record the people's covenant? (Q10) *So that it could be referenced later.*

Samuel wrote the instructions for the king of Israel (1 Sam. 10:25). It most likely included the Mosaic Law's instructions for royalty as recorded in Deuteronomy 17:14–20.

READ: Isaiah 30:8, 9. **ASK:** Why did God want Isaiah to record His message? (Q11) *That it might be a witness against God's rebellious people.*

As mentioned earlier, Jesus and the New Testament writers often quoted from the Old Testament writings. Obviously the written Word of God was authoritative for them.

READ: Matt. 22:29. **ASK:** Why did Jesus condemn the Jewish religious leaders? (Q12) *Because they didn't know the Scriptures, not because they had misunderstood an oral tradition.*

The testimony of Scripture is clear. God wanted His revelation written down and then expected the writings to be respected and treated as His Word. The question is whether the written Word of God is understandable. Do we need additional revelation to even know what the Bible says?

F. Bible's perspicuity

Perspicuous is the word we use to communicate that the Bible is understandable. It means *clear* and *comprehensible*. The Bible has perspicuity in that its message is abundantly clear. It does not need additional documents, pronouncements, or traditions to communicate its obvious message. When a person reads it, there are transformative results. It is accessible and intelligible. Its teaching is direct and complete. Scripture is clear in what it addresses, though that does not mean every passage is easy to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). Understanding certain passages demands careful study. But the fact that there are challenging passages does not mean the Bible is not perspicuous. The failure is not in the clarity of the Bible but in the ability or fault of the person reading it.

Catholics don't believe the Bible has perspicuity. They add their oral tradition to the Bible's teaching and employ their *magisterium* to interpret it authoritatively, claiming no one could fully understand the Bible without their God-ordained help. They essentially point to documents outside the Bible as evidence that the Bible is not perspicuous. But proving the Bible's perspicuity should begin by looking inside the Bible rather than outside the Bible. If the Bible is perspicuous, then there is no need to look for another source of authoritative revelation. The Bible's perspicuity would effectively eliminate the need for both an oral tradition and a God-ordained *magisterium*.

ASK: If the Bible were not perspicuous, then what would stop anyone from claiming he is the one who has the additional revelation from God to help in interpreting the Bible? (Q13) *Nothing! When the Bible is believed to be insufficient in communicating God's truth, then anyone could make a rightful claim to having the rest of God's revelation to complete the picture.*

Lesson two presented the case for the inspiration of Scripture, demonstrating that all of Scripture as recorded by the original authors is inspired and profitable for spiritual growth (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The fact that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit means it is ludicrous to think that it is somehow deficient. Why would God give only part of His body of truth in written form, relegating other parts to oral traditions? Such a plan would make no sense practically and would open up the body of God's revelation to serious error. In fact, that is what has happened. The Catholic Church has used their self-proclaimed authority over the Bible as a means of perverting what are otherwise clear doctrines in the Bible. And the history of the Catholic Church is replete with convenient doctrinal changes that at times helped them fill their coffers and grab political power.

This study has also already addressed the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (lesson 6). In part, it is the Spirit's ministry on behalf of believers that makes the Bible perspicuous. As a believer is diligent to study God's Word, the Holy Spirit will provide understanding so that the individual believer rightly interprets and applies the Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Furthermore, the Bible calls itself a *light*. Such figurative language supports the Bible's perspicuity.

READ: Psalm 119:105. **ASK:** What does this verse reveal about the purpose of God's Word? (Q14) *That it provides direction for life.*

God's intention was to clearly communicate His truth in His Word so that it would be our guide for life. It would make no sense for God to give us a *light* that was not sufficient for illuminating all we need to know about living for God.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Confidence Level

ASK: How confident are you that the Scriptures are your sole authority for faith and practice? (Q15)

ASK: Do you ever wish you could get a set of cliff notes on the Bible that would be an official commentary to help you understand it all? Explain. (Q16)

Encourage your learners to remember the previous lesson about the illumination ministry of the Holy Spirit and to be patient as they study God's Word and learn its truth. It is truly an astounding Book. The more we get to know it, the more we will appreciate just how expertly and coherently it is written and just how powerfully it can affect our lives.

Intrigued?



RESOURCE: Display resource 8. **ASK:** How intriguing is the high church atmosphere to you in light of the evidence for sola scriptura? (Q17)

ASK: What evidence for the Bible's authority helps you see the folly of high church doctrine? (Q18)

ASK: What might you do to prepare yourself to help friends and family members who are intrigued with or involved in Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy? (Q19)

Spend a few minutes praying for friends and family members who are lost and part of Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.