

1998 Summer Lecture Series (Carson City, NV)  
An Introduction to Reformed Theology (#3)  
Sola Scriptura: The Supremacy of Scripture, Yesterday and Today  
June 22, 1998

Sproul, 49-50

The swan would not be silenced, and in one of the most dramatic moments in human history, this swan declared,

Since then your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason- I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have often contradicted each other- my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.

God help me. Amen

There it is, did you hear it, Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason- I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have often contradicted each other- my conscience is captive to the Word of God. **The battle cry of the reformation -- Sola Scriptura, the Scriptures alone!**

How did the church move so far from this? The early church believed it was the holy, catholic, apostolic church, and what that meant was that the apostolic doctrine, that authoritative and final revelation of Jesus Christ through His apostles, was given to the church, in fact, it birthed the church, and the church now possessed it in the apostolic deposit in the Holy Scriptures themselves.

However, around the middle of the third century, there were some bishops who began to teach apostolic succession in the office of bishop.

This view, with all of its problems, finally reached its deadly conclusion when the bishop of Rome declared direct succession from the Apostle Peter, the rock upon which the church was built and to whom were given the keys of the kingdom, and thus began the Roman papacy.

Not only was apostolic succession affirmed through the bishops, and the primacy of the bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter, but then the doctrine of apostolic authority began to evolve in such a way that the church of Rome claims apostolic authority for the Pope and its bishops, which means that their decisions in councils, the magisterium and tradition are authoritatively binding on the whole church. And they alone possess the authority to interpret Scripture. This apostolic succession and authority is secured in both papal, magisterial and traditional infallibility.

Quotations:

During the Renaissance, which was a secular movement, there was a push to go back to the

original sources, in the original languages, and in Providence, it was such a movement which caused a young Luther to take up the Scriptures in the original Greek.

The reformers came down decidedly on Sola Scriptura, Scriptures alone! The Scripture alone is the special, direct revelation of God. Scripture alone is authoritative for faith and practice, Scripture alone is sufficient for all matters concerning faith and practice, and Scripture alone is the perspicuous (clear) voice of God, to be interpreted by itself.

## **I. AUTHORITY**

A. The authority of Scripture is Divine authority. Thus when the Scriptures speak, God speaks. Scripture is absolute and authoritative truth, which makes an authoritative claim on what we believe and how we live. To disbelieve or disobey the Word of God is to disbelieve and disobey God.

B. It is authoritative because of its source (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)

C. How do we know it is authoritative?  
Rome: because we say so!

It is authoritative because it is self-authenticating  
Calvin, Inst. 75-76

External testimony is secondary and subordinate to self-authentication

D. Conclusion: Scripture alone is our sole authority for faith and practice

1. We are bound to believe its doctrines
2. We are bound to obey its precepts and commands
3. But this belief and obedience is not the imposition of raw authoritarianism, rather it flows from grace-transformed hearts which now delight in and love this Holy Word of God.  
Psa. 19:10; 119:97; Job 23:12

## **II. SUFFICIENCY**

A. The sufficiency of Scripture means that God's Word contains everything that is necessary for knowing God, who He is, His salvation through Jesus Christ, and living the Christian life.  
WCF I.6

B. For spiritual birth 1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:18

C. For spiritual life: Deut. 32:47; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:17

## **III. INTERPRETATION** (even if we grant authority and sufficiency, does'nt the church

still have to interpret it for us? Does not authoritative interpretation rest with the church?)

- A. Perspicuity: the basic message of sin and salvation is sufficiently clear for men to understand.  
No special elitism among the priesthood or papacy.  
Luther, "a milk maid armed with holy Scripture is more dangerous than all the popes of Rome."
  
- B. Scripture interprets Scripture:  
Scripture, since it has one Author, is its own best interpreter

#### IV. CONCLUSION

- A. The meaning of Sola Scriptura  
authority -- sufficiency -- self-interpreting
  
- B. Relevance for us today  
Church growth, psychology, charismatic revelation
  1. The Word of God dictates all that we do in worship
  2. The Word of God gives us counsel and direction
  3. The Word of God alone is the final revelation, all others are superfluous.

The reformers were completely dependent on the Word of God, for reformation, for conversion, for the pushing back the kingdom of darkness.

When asked how the work of reformation was accomplished, Luther said, "While we drank beer in Wittenberg, the Word of God did it all."