

## The Regulative Principle of Worship – The Foundation of Sola Scriptura - Part 2

The great Athanasius of Alexandria in North Africa who lived from AD 297-373 - that great defender of Nicene Orthodoxy and the of the full deity of Jesus Christ at times seemingly alone even as the rest of the church was compromising and giving in to false doctrine, wrote these words about Scripture:

These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.' And He reproved the Jews saying, 'Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.'

Another important church father, Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 318-386) wrote:

For concerning the divine and holy mysteries of the Faith, not even a casual statement must be delivered without the Holy Scripture; nor must we be drawn aside by mere plausibility and artifices of speech. Even to me, who tell you these things, do not give ready assent, unless you receive the proof of the things which I announce from the Divine Scriptures. For this salvation which we believe depends not on ingenious reasoning, but on demonstration of the Holy Scriptures.

1) What Sola Scriptura is NOT; 2) What Sola Scriptura IS; 3) The Authority by Which Tradition is Judged - Matthew 15:1-9; 4) Answering Comebacks to Sola Scriptura

### 1) What Sola Scriptura is NOT (5 things):

1. Sola Scriptura is NOT a claim that the Bible contains all knowledge.
2. Sola Scriptura is NOT a claim that the Bible contains all RELIGIOUS knowledge.
3. Sola Scriptura is NOT a denial of the authority of the church to teach and preach God's truth.
4. Sola Scriptura is NOT a denial that the Word of God has, at times, be spoken.
5. Sola Scriptura is NOT a denial of the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and enlightening the Church.

### 2) What Sola Scriptura IS (5 things):

1. Sola Scriptura IS that the Scriptures alone are sufficient to function as the infallible rule of faith for the Church.
2. Sola Scriptura IS that everything one must believe to be a Christian is found in Scripture and in no other source.

New Material:

3. That which is not found in Scripture – either directly or by necessary implication – is NOT binding upon the Christian's conscience.

WSC 1:6 – “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

4. Scripture reveals those things necessary to be saved.

Illustration: One of my children at age 7 – understanding the proper relationship between faith in Jesus and works when it comes to being saved and going to heaven – Ephes. 2:8-10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it

is the gift of God, [9] not of works, lest anyone should boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

⇒ One does not need a theological education to understand the bible – it does make sense.

⇒ This is known as the “perspicuity” of Scripture – spell p-e-r-s-p-i-c-u-i-t-y. It means “clarity.”

**5. All traditions that claim authority are subject to the higher authority of Scripture. Turn to Matthew 15:1-9**

### **3) Matthew 15:1-9 - Our blueprint for judging what men say and teach.**

Let us walk through this passage and learn from the example of the Lord Jesus when it came to the issue of traditions that men may try to bind to our consciences. Notice how Jesus addresses such claims, but also notice: *the blinding power of tradition when it is accepted as divine revelation*. What I mean by that is this: This tradition, this *Corban rule*, so plainly and obviously “made void” a simple and clear command of God - *but the scribes and Pharisees were not able to see how clearly it did!*

**[1] Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, [2] “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”**

**Point:** What is “the tradition of the elders?” These are an extra-biblical body of teachings passed down from the great rabbis and Jewish thinkers through the centuries - gathered together and compiled in the Talmud. The Talmud consists of 63 “tractates” and in printed form today consists of more than 6,200 pages of information. Many of the things contained in these writings were considered by the Jews to be “divine” in origin and on par with OT Scripture itself. **The halacha - “the fence”** - these were rules the Jews had constructed around the OT law in order to prevent them from possibly violating it. They didn’t wash their hands for sanitary reasons, “but for fear that the hands had brushed against a Gentile or against something belonging to a Gentile.

**One commentator wrote:** “Jesus and his disciples observed the Levitical law but disregarded the rabbinical tradition. Yet they did so, not because human customs as such are to be disregarded, but because the PHarisees considered the tradition as binding the conscience by divine authority, binding it even more severely than the written law of God.”

⇒ Jesus is here going to bring up one of these “divinely authoritative traditions” and show how obviously and plainly it transgresses a clear command of God in the law.

**[3] He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? [4] For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ [5] But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”-- [6] then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.**

**Point:** Here we have hypocrisy personified in the scribes and Pharisees. While they, on the basis of man-made “traditions” pretend to find fault in the sinless Son of God, they themselves, by their traditions, have a very clear violation of a very simple and clear law of God: the 5th commandment: “Honor your father and your mother.”

**The power of human tradition:** Very sadly, once human beings invent, elevate, and accept something outside of Scripture as having divine authority, *that “something” outside of Scripture will become their absolute, unquestioned, and dominating authority in their life.*

**Once an authority has been embraced outside of Scripture by a person, what the Scriptures say becomes irrelevant to that person.**

**Application:** Think about the Pharisees - and their devotion to the law of God, their memorization of it, their desire to follow it down to the minute details. AND YET, by establishing their traditions as *authoritative and divine*, they would embrace and believe in traditions which so plainly, so obviously, so "right on the face of it" denied that very law.

**Illustration:** In a debate that took place between 3 Protestants and 3 Roman Catholics in the 1990s, Reformed theologian Michael Horton gave a marvelous presentation on the Biblical doctrine of justification. In that statement, he showed just how obviously and plainly Roman Catholic traditions about justification contradicted Scripture:

In Romans 4, Paul reaches the heart of his argument, appealing to the example of Abraham. 'What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' In other words, a salary isn't a gift; the company owes it to you. Rome actually argues that we merit (de congruo) justification by cooperating with grace. But merit is precisely what Paul is excluding here. 'However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.' In one fell swoop, Paul destroys every plank in the Roman doctrine of justification. Rome says that justification is merited; Paul says it is a gift. Rome says that it is given to those who work for it; Paul says it is given to those who do not work for it. Rome says that God only justifies those who are truly holy inherently; Paul says that God only justifies those who are truly wicked inherently. Rome says that justification is a process of attaining righteousness; Paul says that justification is a declaration of imputed or 'credited' righteousness.

**In one of those 63 "tractates" in the Talmud, there was one that contained this "Corban" rule** - which said what Jesus pointed out in v5-6: "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" - [6] then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

**[7] Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: [8] 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. [9] And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "**

**Point:** Notice that in the mind of Jesus - being near to God is identical to being near to God's Word. When traditions or extra-biblical ideas are elevated to the realm of divine authority, we are no longer worshipping God.

**Notice v9:** It is possible to worship God "in vain." When we believe doctrines not taught in Scripture, and worship in ways God has not commanded us to, our worship of God becomes "void" and we are not truly drawing near to God. We are only drawing near "with our lips," but our "hearts are from" God.

**Application:** If you and I are Christians, we want to honor God and worship God and love God *from our hearts* don't we? We should be just as repelled by hypocrisy as our Lord Jesus was and is.

**1 Tim. 1:5-7** Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, [6] from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, [7] desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

**The last thing in the world any true believer wants to engage in is hypocritical worship of the One true God.**

## 4) Answering Comebacks to the doctrine of Sola Scriptura:

1. **“Well, that’s just your interpretation.”** Thinking that by this statement they’ve cast doubt on our ability to understand Scripture.

**Response:** What could be more obvious? Interpretation is unavoidable – every form of communication we receive is always *interpreted*. “David was King of Israel” – what are the possible interpretations of this? Is: “Solomon was king of Israel” a legitimate interpretation of this statement?

**Application:** We believe in the adequacy of human language to communicate truth.

**Illustration:** “lights out at 9:00 DOES NOT MEAN 9:30.” When my kids interpret 9:00 to mean, 9:30, I do not accept the answer, “Well, that was my *interpretation*...”

**In fact, God believes in the adequacy of human language to communicate truth as well** – which is why Jesus held all of his hearers who had access to the bible **accountable** for having read and understood it.

**Application 2:** The RCC and a thousand cults have insisted for centuries that we all need an *infallible interpreter* of Scripture – and God supposedly gave that to us in the Church hierarchy.

**Rsp:** The problem with this is, of course, one must *interpret* the pronouncements of any and all infallible interpreters. And what are we to do if we disagree in our interpretations of what our infallible interpreters of Scripture tell us? Do we need an infallible of the infallible interpreter?

**2. The Protestant doctrine of Sola Scriptura has resulted in over 25,000 Protestant denominations – Sola Scriptura is an utter failure.**

**Response:** We can simply point out that the principle of “Scripture + an infallible interpreter of Scripture” has resulted ***in an even greater number of religious cults***.

**Response 2:** The reason there are so many Protestant denominations has absolutely nothing to do with the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. The reason for so many Protestant denominations is because of ***not practicing Sola Scriptura***.

**Application:** Every one of us should always be willing to learn, to subject our traditions and interpretations to the scrutiny and review of Scripture. Sadly, few Protestants are willing to do so... We suffer from sloth and laziness. Bible study is tough work – it takes a tremendous amount of discernment and discipline – and few in the modern church have the stomach for it. Hence, we remain divided.

**Illustration:** However, when you consider the Protestant denominations that have applied the doctrine of Sola Scriptura with the most consistency – like the Post-Reformation Lutheran theologians, Reformed theologians, and Calvinistic Baptist theologians – the ***degree of unity is astonishing***. And in fact, I would make this assertion against any group that claims “Scripture + infallible interpreter of Scripture” results in greater unity among professing “Christians”:

***Those churches who love the Word of God, submit to the Word of God, and are willing to be Reformed and corrected by the Word of God are and always have been far more united in their doctrine than any groups that have practiced “Scripture + infallible interpreter”***

Why take the time to cover all of this? The truth of Sola Scriptura is under attack in our day – and few are able to defend it. I have read many stories of Christians converting to “authoritarian” groups – like Rome, like Eastern Orthodoxy, like Mormonism, like the JW’s, like the Unification Church, etc.

⇒ What do all of these stories have in common? ***An inability of the Christian to defend the Biblical doctrine of Sola Scriptura.***

⇒ How is 2 Thessalonians 2:15 used?

**2 Thes. 2:15** “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”

**Opponents:** See, Paul is telling the Thessalonians and us today that we are to hold to everything he taught whether it was *spoken orally* OR *written in Scripture*.

**False teaching:** See, Paul himself pointed to TWO sources of the “traditions” we are to hold to – oral tradition and written tradition. And these are two separate sources of doctrine – each is distinct.

**False Assumption:** What Paul taught them orally while he was with them is *different in substance and doctrinal content* from what he taught them *in writing*.

**Corrective:** notice the text of v15 here – there is ONE and ONLY ONE body of truth that was delivered in TWO WAYS, NOT two bodies of doctrine delivered in two ways. The Thessalonians are to hold to “the traditions” – ONE body of teaching, NOT TWO – i.e. the “teachings” Paul taught them *whether by word or our epistle*. Paul IS NOT referring to TWO SEPARATE AND DISTINCT BODIES OF DOCTRINE, but to ONE BODY OF DOCTRINE delivered in TWO WAYS.

**What did Paul teach them orally and in writing?** “The gospel of Jesus Christ” – that is what Paul is telling them to HOLD FAST to. Not to some mysterious, verbal-only traditions that would never be written down.

**The way this is misused:** I have heard and read Roman Catholic apologists say that this is where Paul actually taught the Thessalonians about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences, the doctrines about Mary, etc. Mormons and other groups use it in the same way.

**“Oral Tradition” = a wax nose – the false religion’s license to define as doctrine whatever they want to.**

**How to challenge opponents of Sola Scriptura.** What if I made this claim: *I am holding here in my hand a watch that is utterly unique – there is not a watch anywhere in the entire universe that is just like it.* How could you disprove that claim? **Just show me another watch, right?**

**That is exactly what we are doing with Scripture – we are saying it has no equal, nothing else like it, nothing else that is God-breathed.** How can opponents of Sola Scriptura absolutely destroy our doctrine of Sola Scriptura? ***Show us another source of God-breathed truth – show it to us!***

**Illustration:** In a debate with noted scholar Fr. Mitchell Pacwa on the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, Dr. James White asked him this direct question in cross examination – after Pacwa himself had cited 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “Father Pacwa, given your denial of Scriptura as the sole source of what Jesus and the apostles taught, can you tell us a single word that Jesus or the apostles said or taught that is not found in the New Testament?” Fr. Pacwa paused for a long time and then said, “No, I cannot, we have not defined anything.”

**Svendsen’s quotation:** “Catholic apologists often cite this passage (John 20:30) as proof of oral tradition not written in Scripture. But if this constitutes proof for non-inscripturated, apostolic oral tradition, then it also provides proof that Rome has not held to that apostolic tradition; for Rome has not preserved any deeds or sayings of Jesus outside of the Scriptures that are considered authoritative and binding...”

**Point:** You see, denials of Sola Scriptura and the claims made for knowing about traditions or teachings the apostles and Christ gave to the church that were never written down always prove to be **empty claims**. Those who make such claims must be forced to **produce** these **unwritten traditions** or withdraw the claim to have them at all. **When people cite 2 Thessalonians 2:15 as proof against Sola Scriptura, insist that they show you what these traditions are and what they teach.**

**Nothing new under the sun.** The claim to own extra-biblical traditions is not a new claim. The very earliest believers in church history dealt with exactly the same claims.

**Here is a quotation written by a Christian - see if you can tell *when* this may have been written:**

Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures... When, however, they are confuted from the Scriptures, they turn round and accuse these same Scriptures, as if they were not correct, nor of authority, and assert that they are ambiguous, and that the truth cannot be extracted from them by those who are ignorant of "tradition." For they allege that the truth was not delivered by means of written documents, but by oral tradition. **[Not from a Protestant writer in the 1500s or 1600s. But from Irenaeus:**

**This was written sometime between 182 and 188 AD!** And yet, it sounds like an argument from today between Protestants and Catholics doesn't it? There's nothing new under the sun – Opponents of Sola Scriptura existed even *that* early on.

**Conclusion:** 2 Thessalonians 2:15 is an exhortation to a precious early church to hold fast to the gospel message and the simple truths of the Christian faith – not a command to hold to a mysterious body of extra-Scriptural revelation. Sadly, many continue to misuse this passage to be teaching this. And even more sadly, many are taken in and deceived by those who argue against Sola Scriptura using this passage.

**Sola Scriptura** is a vital truth. Don't let anyone take that precious truth from you by smooth words of flattery and deceit. There are many in our day who are enamored by "the infallible fuzzies." People like to hand over their responsibility for what they believe to others. Authoritarian groups who provide alleged "infallibility" in their hierarchies are a dime a dozen. But remember what the Lord Jesus said about His sheep: **John 10:27** "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." The sheep of Christ listen to the voice of Christ, and they hear that voice *only* in the pages of inspired Scripture. None of us are infallible, but God is. There are many errors men can make – some are more serious than others. But the greatest error men can make is to think themselves *incapable* of error. We love and practice Sola Scriptura by submitting ourselves, our hearts, our actions, our priorities, and our beliefs to the authority of Scripture and by always having a willingness to be corrected by what it says – ***because what Scripture says, God says.***

**Jude 1:24-25** [24] Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, [25] To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *Be* glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.