

SOLA SCRIPTURA VERSUS SOLO SCRIPTURA: THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 4:1-16

I. THE TEACHING AND INTERPRETIVE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH (Matthew 16:16-19; 28:18-20)

A. The church (built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone [Eph.2:20-22]) is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. This authority is spoken of when Jesus said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 16:19).

“Giving the keys of the kingdom to Peter implies that the teaching office has been taken from the scribes and Pharisees (and Sadducees) because of their malfeasance (compare Isa 22:15-22). This saying divinely legitimates the teaching authority of the church against that of the church’s opponents” (Garland, *Reading Matthew* p.175).

B. In giving the keys to Peter, Jesus is taking them away from the Jewish religious leaders (**Luke 11:52**; cf. Matthew 21:42-45; 23:2-3).

Matthew 16:19

“I will give you the keys of the **kingdom of heaven**; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 23:13

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the **kingdom of heaven** from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

1. The Jews had corrupted the interpretation of the Law (Matthew 5:17-20; 7:27).
2. The religious leaders had continually perverted the demands of the law for mercy and sacrifice, as is evidenced by Jesus’ teaching about the Sabbath (12:1-14)
3. The Jews had invalidated the Fifth Commandment for the sake of their tradition (Matthew 15:1-8).
4. Jesus warned His disciples, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt.16:11-12).
5. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (**Matthew 26:63-66**).
6. The teaching authority of the church is one of the main points of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; see also 1 Timothy 4:11; Titus 2:15).

II. PROTESTANT REFORMATION: SOLA SCRIPTURA VERSUS SOLO SCRIPTURA

Sola Scriptura simply means “by Scripture alone”. It is the belief that the Scriptures are completely sufficient for everything that we need for faith, life and godliness.

Solo Scriptura is the perversion of the historic Protestant teaching of “*sola scriptura*.” The reformers taught that the church is an authoritative interpreter of Scripture, but not an infallible interpreter of Scripture. Solo scriptura is the belief that the church is not an authoritative interpreter of Scripture, or is only authoritative when “I agree with it.” Sola Scriptura is the belief that all I need to interpret the Scriptures properly is “Me, My Bible and the Holy Spirit.”

- A. Many people today wrongly think that the Bible is the only authority for our faith and life. But this is not what the reformers taught. They taught that the Bible is the only **infallible** rule and authority for faith and life. The reformers never intended for people to reject the authority of the church.
- B. Creeds and confessions are one of the ways the church exercises the keys of the kingdom and therefore we are to read the Bible in light of them. The Protestant view of the authority of the church over history is summed up in the Latin phrase, “*norma normata*” meaning that the church and creeds are a rule (*norma*) that is ruled (*normata*) by Scripture.

“*Solo scriptura* is the ecclesiastical equivalent of a nation with a constitution but no court of law to interpret that constitution. Both can lead to chaos.” (Keith Mathison, “A Critique of the Evangelical Doctrine of Solo Scriptura”).

“I venerate them [ecumenical councils] from my heart, and desire that they be honored by all.” (John Calvin *Institutes*, IX.ix.1 “Councils and Their Authority”).

Just after the Shorter Catechism, the Westminster Assembly appended the Apostles Creed saying that it is “a brief sum of the Christian faith, agreeable to the Word of God, and anciently received in the Churches of Christ.”

C. Every elder in the RPCNA must accept the doctrine of the manner of worship set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, as being agreeable to, and founded upon, the Scriptures. He must also promise subjection in the Lord to the courts of the RPCNA.

"He who would consistently banish creeds must silence all preaching and reduce the teaching of the church to the recital of the exact words of Holy Scripture without note or comment." – Robert Louis Dabney

D. One of the “creeds” of *solo scriptura* is “No creed but the Bible.”

1. Which Bible?

2. The Apocrypha?

3. Does the Bible contain: The Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Didache, the Apocrypha, or Jubilees, 1 Enoch, Joseph Ben Gurion’s medieval history of the Jews and nations, Ethiopic Clement or the Ethiopic Book of the Covenant? What about the Book of Mormon? Why or why not?

Biblical Creeds and Confessions found in the Bible: Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Kings 18:38; Many of the Psalms are creeds God’s people sang; Matthew 16:16; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7; 1 Timothy 3:15-16.

4. Chapter 1, paragraph 2 of the Westminster Confession of Faith lists the books of the Old and New Testament? Paragraph 3 of chapter 1 of the WCF rejects the Apocrypha as not being of divine inspiration.

E. When the teaching authority of the church is rejected and the individual grabs holds of the keys, you end up with doctrinal relativism.

F. Does doctrine divide? Do churches without doctrine split less than churches that have Confessions, Creeds and Catechisms? Of course not! *Personal* doctrine divides, but Church doctrine rooted in Scripture unites.

“For we also say that the church is the interpreter of Scripture, and that the gift of interpretation resides only in the church: but we deny that it pertains to particular persons, or is tied to any particular see [jurisdiction; i.e. the bishop of Rome] or succession of men.” (William Whitaker [1547-1595], *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* [Cambridge,: University Press, 1849] p. 411). William Whitaker was a Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and his book, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* was influential on the Westminster Assembly and chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer.

What was the title of this morning’s sermon and why?

Why does Jesus take the keys of the kingdom from the religious leaders of His day and give them to Peter (and the Apostles)?

What does *sola scriptura* mean? How is *sola scriptura* different from *solo scriptura*?

In ordinary circumstances, no _____ outside the church.

In ordinary circumstances, there is no true biblical _____ that takes place outside the church.

Explain the following, “If you don’t know the Westminster Confession or catechisms very well then you don’t know the Scriptures very well.”

Explain the meaning of and what is wrong with the creed, “No creed but the Bible.”

Why does a rejection of church authority lead to doctrinal relativism?

Does doctrine divide?

“There never has been a period in which the Christian Church has been without a Confession of Faith, though these Confessions have varied both in character and in extent. The first and simplest Confession is that of Peter: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That of the Ethiopian treasurer is similar, and almost identical: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” This Confession secured admission into the Church; but without this, admission could not have been obtained. It was not long till this simple and brief primitive Confession was enlarged; at first, in order to meet the perverse notions of the Judaizing teachers, and next, to exclude those who were beginning to be tainted with the Gnostic heresies. It then became necessary, not only to confess that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but also that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh, in order to prevent the admission, and to check the teaching, of those who held that Christ’s human nature was a mere phantasm or appearance. In like manner the rise of any heresy rendered it necessary, first, to test the novel tenet by the Word of God and by the decision of the Holy Spirit, and then to add to the existing Confession of Faith a new article, containing the deliverance of the Church respecting each successive heresy. Thus, in the discharge of her duty to God, to the world, and to herself, the Church was constrained to enlarge the Confession of her Faith.

William Hetherington, *The History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Chapter 6)