

Bbl only

Where does it say "Bible Only"?

The idea that Christianity depends entirely on the Scriptures and nothing but the Scriptures, has been around a little over 500 years. It is a non-Biblical Protestant tradition. It seems a bit of a conundrum since the tradition of, "Bible only," is not found in the Bible. None of the ancient Churches today or in history ever held this. Holy Scripture, of course is central to all Christianity. It is a precious gift of God to His Church, but where does the idea of, "Bible only," come from?

It seems the idea of a, ***Religion of the Book***, rather than a ***Religion of God's Church***, seems to have filtered into Christianity from Islam during the Crusades. People who dislike authority often welcome such ideas.

Early in Church history already the Montanists wanted to override Church authority. They wanted to do this with direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, however, had appointed apostles whose Church's authority would be guided by this Holy Spirit. It is reasonable to say that the Holy Spirit would not say one thing to the apostolic bishops and a contrary thing to a disagreeing group.

Through the years people have often resented God-given human authority, especially in religious matters. The Gnostics wanted to substitute apostolic authority in the Church with secret knowledge. The Caesaropapists agreed that the Roman Emperor should control everything including God's Church.

The devil's pride infects good people causing many to resent God's authority, especially when it is given to sin-wounded humans, and most especially to bishops who we expect to be perfect. This same pride can also cause some sin-wounded bishops to abuse God's gifts. We are all wounded by sin. In the last 500 years many European Christians with a negative experience of

God's plan for leadership decided to place all Christian authority in Holy Scripture alone. This is a human invention; a tradition of man.

Where did that idea come from? We find traces of it in European Christianity about 150 years before Luther. At that time a dissident Catholic priest and liberal College professor named John Wycliffe; (1320-1384) popularized the idea of Sola-Scriptura (Bible Only). He wrote an unauthorized translation of Scripture into English that had footnotes against Church authority and that promoted the idea of Bible only. Catholics were soon forbidden to use this translation. Later Luther, Calvin and other protestant founders took up Wycliffe's ideas to replace the apostolic teaching authority of the Pope and bishops in the Church. Many civil aristocrats, wanting no moral restrictions on their authority supported them.

Remember also, Wycliffe lived several decades before the invention of the printing press. Printing finally made Bibles available for ordinary people. For the first 1500 years of Christianity ordinary people had to depend largely on preaching for knowledge of the Word of God. This was one of the major missions of the Church founded by Jesus with the Apostles. Jesus wrote nothing we know of; neither did most of the apostles. New Testament writings came from the early Church over a period of several decades. Only much later were they gathered together to help the Church in her divine mission of spreading the Good News. Early Christianity could not have been Bible only. Writings of the Apostolic Fathers agree it was not. When we look at the surviving historical writings of this period we see the Church of apostolic succession was quite sacrament centered and organized under a hierarchy of bishops in union with the Church of Rome. We find no mention of anything to support Bible only.

The Mother Church of all Christianity is not built on a book. It is built on the twelve apostles of Jesus Himself. In the Book of the

Revelation in the Bible we read that the heavenly temple is built on a foundation of twelve large stones each with the name of one of the apostles written on it. The Church of Jesus is built on the foundation of the twelve apostles. In the Bible we have only two gospels written by apostles and perhaps four apostolic epistle writers. Where are the other six foundation stones in a Bible Only Fellowship? Such groups have an incomplete foundation. Where do we find foundational support and full apostolic guidance with only the Bible? Without the supporting structure of the apostolic oral tradition alive in the Church, we have incomplete Christianity.

Some may say that apostolic authority was necessary only in the early Church. They argue that once the Holy Scriptures were written, divinely appointed teachers were no longer needed. The problem with this is that this is also not in the Bible. A Catholic Tradition accepted by most Protestants is that the actual inspired writing of Holy Scripture ended with the death of the last of the Twelve apostles. This, however, does not mean the Bible alone has the complete Word of God.

We should note here, the Bible has **no inspired Table of Contents**. The canon, or official list of inspired books of the Bible, was unsettled in the early Church. There were many books written in the early Church times, some good and some not so true. Only a few made their way into the New Testament. The canon was finally agreed upon by a gathering of Catholic bishops with the Pope when the Church was about 400 years old.

A thousand years later Protestants did accept the Catholic Tradition for the New Testament, but rejected seven Old Testament books because they were not in the Jewish canon. At the time of Jesus, however, the only universally accepted Jewish canon consisted of only the first five books or the Torah of Moses. The other books plus some other writings were variously accepted or rejected by different groups of Jews. The Jewish Canon copied by

Protestants was only established by the rabies after the time of the apostles, and after the destruction of the Temple.

Closely related to the tradition of Bible only are two other non-biblical traditions of most Protestantism. They are private interpretation and the cannon of the Bible itself.

Private interpretation contends that the Bible explains itself and/or that the Holy Spirit directly guides readers in understanding the doctrines and truths and commands of the Bible. This denies the very scriptural role of chosen Church leaders to hand down the true interpretations of God's Word. (Mt.10:40, Mt.28:19-20, Acts 15:28, Mt. 16:18-19, 2 Peter1:20 and many others.)

God chose leaders for religious matters in Old Testament times, and He didn't change His mind in the New. He did not replace them with a Book. Like the authority of Moses and Aaron continued until Jesus, the authority of Jesus through the apostles continues today until Jesus comes again. Holy Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition, which is alive in the living memory of the Church, both bear witness to the legitimate need for Divinely appointed leadership. Jesus provided this for His Church through His apostles and their successors. Secular history confirms the continuous presence of popes and bishops from the beginning. When Jesus comes in glory the need for these human ambassadors will come to an end.

In the meantime the interpretation of Holy Scripture is the appointed job of bishops in apostolic succession. Even the few sinful popes in history were protected by the Holy Spirit for our sake, and did not make false statements in matters of faith. That in itself is a witness of God's protection.

On the practical side, think of the mess our country would be in if we practiced private interpretation of the Constitution. We all have

God given intellects. Don't courts interfere with our freedom of choice? That's silly and we know it. Yet God's word is much more important than any man made laws.

God is no fool. Private interpretation simply does not work. Look at the disunity in faith among the thousands of Protestant denominations. Jesus is Truth, and truth is one. Jesus did not found a debating society.

Here we need to make a distinction between interpretation in matters of biblical doctrine, and private reading for personal guidance. For those of us submissive to Church in doctrinal matters, prayerful Bible reading is a gift of hearing a personal word from our Creator. This, of course, is good. Such meditation is highly encouraged and was never officially forbidden by the Church. A few bishops in various struggles in history did discourage lay people from reading scripture, but this was never approved by Rome. Local bishops did sometimes discourage or even forbid private Bible reading and group studies by untrained lay people. This was a reaction to anti-Catholic Bible study movements after the Protestant separation. These, then as often today, were traps to lead poorly catechized Catholics away from their faith.

People, wounded by self centeredness, have always found it an affront to their pride to accept obedient submission to God when it comes to them in human flesh. Let us keep in mind that even the human writers of Holy Scripture were sin-stained humans. That's all God has to work with, yet that's the way He chooses to speak to us. The Bible was not delivered to us by holy angels from heaven, fully written. As mere humans we sometimes wish it was, but it was not. The fullness of the Word of God is not a book but a person. This Holy Person is risen and alive among us in His mystical Body. We, His baptized people, under the leadership of His appointed apostles are the flesh and bones of this Holy Body

alive and active among us. He is the Head, we are the members; the tissues and organs of the Body. He alone is the fullness of Truth and Light, and Everlasting Life.

The Magisterium, or teaching authority of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church completely agrees that the Holy Bible is the inerrant Word of God to us. Nothing the Church teaches can contradict the Bible because the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself. We absolutely trust the Bible but the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, is not restricted to Bible only. It is the guaranteed infallible interpreter and guardian of both Holy Scripture and Holy Apostolic Tradition. The one original worldwide Apostolic Church of all Christianity is the visibleness of our resurrected and ever living Savior, Jesus Christ, under the protection of God the Holy Spirit, to the Glory of God the Father. Amen.