

Q. The Catholic Church accuses that the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, or the Bible alone, makes every person his own pope. How do you answer this?

A. This is a false accusation. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that only the pope and the bishops in communion with him—referred to as "the Magisterium of the Church"—can authentically interpret the Word of God. The pope in Rome does not look to Scripture alone for his personal understanding as he is led by God through the Holy Spirit. Instead, the pope looks to Scripture and church tradition, along with his belief in his own infallibility, to make decisions that he then imposes on millions of other people.

Someone who properly understands the doctrine of the Bible alone, however, knows that he does not have the authority to impose his beliefs on others. As I said in the last paragraph of my article, "Part One: The End of *Sola Scriptura*—'By Scripture Alone'" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/endofreformation.htm>),

What it comes down to is trusting that God knows how to deal with each of His saints as He sees fit. He has equipped them with His Spirit and His Word. Sure, they may make mistakes. We may in brotherly love tell them where we think they have erred. But God has not put us in a position to condemn anyone whose beliefs differ from ours. Those who want to water *sola scriptura* down to mean by Scripture as interpreted by tradition or the church or the creeds or the pastor or anyone or anything else are not grasping the significance of what God is doing under the New Covenant. Jesus Christ has opened the way for each believer to have a direct relationship with God. The New Covenant is a time of maturity. Yes, God has gifted some to teach. And each of us should be able to advise when consulted. But no person or persons have the authority to impose a supposedly authentic interpretation of Scripture on anyone. Each believer is a priest, who can

communicate directly with God both in prayer and in reading what God says to him "by Scripture alone"—*sola scriptura*. Keep *sola scriptura* alive in your walk with God even if the Protestant institutions are crumbling.

It comes down to a matter of faith. We are either putting our faith in the pope or someone else, such as a church pastor, to interpret the Bible for us, or we are putting our faith in the Holy Spirit to interpret the Bible for us.

This does not mean, as some misinterpret it, that the truth of the Bible is subjective and varies with each person. I am not saying, as theological liberals do, that what is true for me may not be true for you. The Bible is objective truth. We should ask God to reveal that truth to us through the Holy Spirit as we read the Bible.

I am also not saying that we are to become fortified islands, never hearing what someone else has to say. Other people also have the Holy Spirit, and they may be able to teach us or correct us. In 1 Corinthians 14:36, Paul says, "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?"

If two people who are objectively seeking the truth differ over a passage of the Bible, at least one of them is wrong. There may be many reasons that may cause someone to be wrong, such as unknowingly holding a preconceived notion concerning the subject or not adequately checking context and language. All of us can be wrong at times. This fact should cause us to be humble. We can teach in a positive way, but we should be willing to listen to those who bring up legitimate questions or propose alternative interpretations. And we should be willing to correct our views if proved wrong.

It is all too easy because of our frail human nature to accuse those who differ with us of being displeasing to God or of having a pride problem or of not being converted or of heresy. This is why it is so dangerous for the church and the state to be tied together. In the past, this has led to those who believe the Bible says "A" using the sword of the state to execute thousands of people simply because they believed the Bible said "B," while just over a border those who believed the Bible said "B" were killing thousands who believed it said "A" (all the while, there being no guarantee that the Bible said either "A" or "B").

So, the doctrine of *sola scriptura* does not make every Christian his own pope. This is because the pope tries to impose his beliefs on others, while Christians who believe in *sola scriptura* do not. Instead, they look for guidance from the Holy Spirit, they do not blindly put their trust in men and let them interpret the Bible for them, yet they do not forget that guidance might come from the Holy Spirit through another person.

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