

Sola Scriptura Defended

Disclaimer: My original SS Defense was 10 pages long, so I asked ChatGPT to make it more concise. Any robotic language is a result of the AI condensing some of my points.

Is Sola Scriptura a tenable position? Do we need an infallible interpreter to understand Scripture? Does the Church have more authority than the Bible because it assembled the Bible?

These are common objections raised against Protestants who hold to *Sola Scriptura*, especially by Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers. They argue that relying on Scripture alone opens the door to endless interpretations, leading to the many Protestant denominations today. Meanwhile, they claim their own churches remain united under apostolic authority. But even they are not free from division — ask ten Orthodox priests about predestination or tollhouses, and you'll get ten different answers. Likewise, the Roman Church has its own schisms, such as the Sedevacantists and Old Catholics, who claim to preserve true tradition.

Before addressing these objections, we need to make something clear: **every Christian uses tradition** in some way. Whether you consult a study Bible, listen to a pastor, or read the church fathers, you're relying on tradition to help interpret God's Word. That's not a violation of *Sola Scriptura*. The doctrine doesn't mean the Bible is the *only* authority — it means it's the *only infallible* one. Councils, creeds, and confessions hold real, secondary authority because they reflect Scripture, not because they stand apart from it.

Scripture vs. Tradition

All Christians agree that Scripture is infallible. The burden of proof, then, lies on Catholics and Orthodox believers to demonstrate that another infallible authority exists outside the Bible — something they cannot do without circular reasoning. Each apostolic church (Roman, Eastern, Oriental, Assyrian) claims to be the one true Church, but none can prove it infallibly without appealing to Scripture and history — both of which often contradict their claims.

Now, let's look at *tradition*.

The Church Fathers disagree on almost everything. Some even taught serious errors. Jerome, though brilliant, sometimes used subordinationist language about Christ. Irenaeus believed Jesus was around 50 at His death. Tertullian, who coined "Trinity," later joined a heretical sect. You'd need an infallible interpreter just to interpret the Fathers! They contradict one another on topics like grace, free will, and authority. So how do we discern truth among them? By comparing everything to Scripture — the one infallible standard God has given.

What About the Councils and Creeds?

Catholics and Orthodox point to the ecumenical councils and creeds as infallible. But even councils have erred.

- Some early councils supported iconoclasm, later overturned.
- The “Robber Council” of Ephesus (449) was politically corrupted.
- Local canons often conflicted across regions.

Councils are authoritative *only insofar as they align with Scripture*.

“But Sola Scriptura Isn’t in the Bible”

Critics argue that Sola Scriptura is self-defeating because it isn’t explicitly stated in Scripture. But that logic is inconsistent. The word “Trinity” isn’t in the Bible either — yet it’s derived from Scripture. In the same way, Sola Scriptura is grounded in Scripture’s teaching (e.g., 2 Timothy 3:16-17) and affirmed by tradition (e.g., Augustine), even if not phrased **explicitly**.

Some will say, “You can’t use the Bible to prove the Bible.” But that charge applies equally — how do you prove the Church’s authority? The Church says it’s infallible because it says so. That’s circular. And if you appeal to “Tradition,” which tradition do you mean — Roman, Eastern, or Oriental? Who decides between them? Every path eventually appeals back to Scripture as the final judge.

Yes, citing Scripture to affirm Scripture is circular in a sense, but at least it’s an appeal to *God’s Word*, not human institutions.

Determining the Essentials of the Faith

Critics say that without an infallible Church, we can’t know the essentials of Christianity. However, Protestants affirm the **perspicuity of Scripture** — that its core teachings are clear and accessible. For example, Paul calls the Gospel “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3). The early creeds summarize Biblical truth; they don’t add new revelation. Authority doesn’t require infallibility — civil law binds us even though legislators err.

Moreover, the early Christians before Nicaea didn’t rely on an infallible magisterium to defend truth. Irenaeus, Athanasius, and others appealed to Scripture against heresy. Paul himself tells

Timothy that Scripture is *sufficient* for teaching and correction (2 Tim. 3:15–17), not that the Church is infallible.

On the Church's Alleged Infallibility

If the Magisterium were truly infallible, history would not show so many failures. The moral corruption of the Avignon papacy, the sale of indulgences, and contradictory papal statements show that “infallibility” is often retroactively patched by later councils. Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, which suggests Muslims share in God's plan of salvation, directly contradicts John 14:6. Similarly, the Orthodox claim to consistency, but even they reversed their own councils — such as the iconoclastic Council of Hieria (754), later condemned by Nicaea II.

Both churches claim to have “assembled” the Bible, but this too is circular reasoning:

“The Church is infallible because it gave us the Bible; the Bible has authority because the Church says so.”

Scripture alone avoids this loop by being self-authenticating — *God-breathed* (2 Tim. 3:16–17), not Church-certified.

The Canon and Church Authority

The Church did not *create* the canon; it *recognized* it. The U.S. Supreme Court didn't create the Constitution; it interprets and recognizes its authority. By the fourth century, most churches were already using the same books. Athanasius' Easter Letter (367) listed the 27 New Testament books before any council ratified them. Jerome affirmed the same 66-book canon Protestants hold today and excluded the Apocrypha from Scripture (“What is not found in our list [the 66-book canon] must be placed amongst the Apocryphal writings” - *Prologus Galeatus*). Furthermore, those councils are local, not ecumenical, which means the Roman Catholic Church did not have an infallible canon until the 16th-century ecumenical Council of Trent. The Eastern Orthodox have a different problem: they never had an ecumenical council that dogmatically defined the canon (their canon is considered “open” or “fluid”). This causes a lack of uniformity in what constitutes the Scriptures and poses a greater problem: It creates a circular argument when it comes to defending their deposit of Tradition. If the canon is determined by Tradition, but Scripture and the Apostles determine that the Church's traditions cannot err, then you've just used tradition to justify tradition.

The Deuterocanonical books, while historically valuable, contain doctrinal contradictions (e.g., Tobit 12:9; Sirach 3:30; 2 Maccabees 12:45–46) and were never accepted as Scripture by the Jewish people or many early Fathers. They were read for edification, not doctrine. Moreover, some additions are clearly fantastical in nature and have legendary elements, such as Bel and

the Dragon, which features the prophet Daniel killing a literal dragon by feeding him cakes, which results in him exploding.

God can use fallible people and institutions to preserve His Word — just as He inspired fallible men to write Scripture. The Church's recognition of the canon doesn't prove its infallibility; it proves God's providence.

Conclusion: Why Sola Scriptura Is Consistent

If final authority rests on a fallible institution, then doctrinal certainty rests on a fallible foundation. But if Scripture alone is God-breathed and infallible, then it alone provides a secure basis for truth.

Syllogism:

1. If final authority depends on fallible humans, certainty is impossible.
2. Doctrinal certainty must rest on an infallible foundation.
3. Therefore, only Scripture — as God's Word — can be that foundation.

In practice, *Sola Scriptura* does not mean “every man for himself.” It affirms the following:

- Scripture interprets Scripture.
- We use sound hermeneutics to ensure proper reading of Scripture.
- We respect creeds and Fathers (as well as modern-day resources such as pastors and commentaries) as valuable aids, not final judges.
- The Church teaches and corrects, but remains accountable to Scripture.
- The Holy Spirit illuminates believers and the Church to understand truth.

When Scripture stands as the supreme authority, the Church remains grounded in God's Word — not human claims of infallibility.

The Case for Sola Scriptura

Speaking biblically, who holds greater authority — the Bible or the Church? If the Church truly follows apostolic teaching, then that claim should be discernible from the apostles' own writings, which we now possess in Scripture. Yet nowhere in the Bible do we find the Church described as having authority over the Word of God; rather, the opposite is consistently affirmed.

After Jesus' ascension, the apostles held unique authority as divinely inspired messengers of Christ. Jesus declared, "He who hears you hears Me" (Luke 10:16), meaning that apostolic teaching — whether spoken or written — carried the very authority of Christ Himself. As the apostles wrote their letters, those writings became Scripture, not because the Church later canonized them, but because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21).

The early church in the New Testament clearly recognized this authority and submitted to it. Paul commended the Thessalonians for receiving his message "not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). He instructed believers to "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter" (2 Thess. 2:15), and insisted that "the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37).

Scripture describes the Church as being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20). The foundation — the apostolic witness — came first, and the Church was established upon it. The Church's role was to preserve, teach, and obey the Word, not to define or supersede it. Paul even warns against elevating any authority above the written Word, urging believers "not to go beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6) and pronouncing a curse on anyone — even an apostle or angel — who preaches a contrary gospel (Gal. 1:8).

Furthermore, the early church fathers also submitted to apostolic authority. For example:

- Irenaeus writes: "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith..." (Against Heresies, Book 3, Chapter 1).
- John Chrysostom writes, "There comes a heathen and says, I wish to become a Christian, but I know not whom to join: there is much fighting and faction among you, much confusion: which doctrine am I to choose? How shall we answer him? Each of you (says he) asserts, 'I speak the truth.' (b) No doubt: this is in our favor. For if we told you to be persuaded by arguments, you might well be perplexed: but if we bid you believe the Scriptures, and these are simple and true, the decision is easy for you. If any agree with the Scriptures, he is the Christian; if any fight against them, he is far from this rule." (Homily 33 on Acts)
- Augustine writes: "Among the things that are plainly laid down in Scripture are to be found all matters that concern faith and the manner of life" (On Christian Doctrine)

The Church's role was to preserve the apostles' teachings, and anything that contradicted them could not be considered part of sacred tradition. Today, we follow that same principle: the

apostles' teachings, as recorded in Scripture, hold ultimate authority, and all other teachings must align with the Bible.

Thus, while the Church serves as “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15), her role is *ministerial*, not *magisterial*. She upholds and proclaims the truth, but she does not create or determine it. The New Testament consistently presents Scripture — the inspired Word of God — as the ultimate authority *over* the Church, not the other way around.