

Sola Scriptura and the Church Fathers

Compiled by Joel Herndon

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We know that the Scriptures are perfect, as being spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit.

(St. Irenaeus c. A.D. 120-c. 203, *Lib. II c. 47*)

We have received the disposition of our salvation by no others, but those by whom the Gospel came to us; which they then preached, and afterwards by God's will delivered to us in the Scriptures, to be the pillar and ground of our faith.

(St. Irenaeus, *Lib. III. c. 1*)

Let the shop of Hermogenes prove that what it advances is written; or if it be not written, let it fear the malediction uttered against those who dare to add or to retrench.

(Tertullian c. 160-240, *adv. Hermog.*)

There is one God, whom we do not otherwise acknowledge, brethren, but out of the Sacred Scriptures. For as he, who would profess the wisdom of this world cannot otherwise attain it, unless he read the doctrines of the philosophers; so whosoever will exercise piety towards God, can learn it no where but from the Holy Scriptures.

(St. Hippolytus c. 170-c.235, *adv. Noetum*, c. IX)

They have not hesitated to corrupt the word of God; they have treated the standard of the primitive faith with contempt; they have not known Christ. Instead of asking what Holy Scripture says, they strain every nerve to find a syllogistic figure to bolster up their godlessness. If anyone challenges them with a text from Divine Scripture, they examine it to see whether it can be turned into a conjunctive or disjunctive syllogistic figure. They put aside the sacred word of God, and devote themselves to geometry—earth measurement—because they are from the earth and speak from the earth, and do not know the One who comes from above. Some of them give all their energies to the study of Euclidean geometry, and treat Aristotle and Theophrastus with reverent awe; to some of them Galen is almost an object of worship. When people avail themselves of the arts of unbelievers to lend colour to their heretical views, and with godless rascality corrupt the

simple Faith of Holy Writ, it is obvious that they are nowhere near the Faith. (Eusebius c. 260-c.340, in *The History of the Church*, Book 5, quoting an anonymous “orthodox churchman” who wrote during the time of Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome A.D. 201-217)

In the two testaments every word that pertaineth unto God may be sought and discussed, and out of them all knowledge of things may be understood. And if anything remains which Holy Scripture does not determine, no other third scripture ought to be received to authorize any knowledge, but we must “commit to the fire” what remains, that is, reserve it unto God.

(Origen c. 185-c.254, *Hom. in Lev.*)

When I arrived in the district of Arsinoe, when as you know this notion had long been widely held, so that schisms and secessions of entire churches had taken place, I called a meeting of the presbyters and teachers of the village congregations, with any laymen who wished to attend, and urged them to thrash out the question in public. So they brought me this book as positive and irrefutable proof, and I sat with them for three days on end from dawn to dusk, criticizing its contents point by point. In the process I was immensely impressed by the essential soundness, complete sincerity, logical grasp, and mental clarity shown by these good people, as we methodically and good-temperedly dealt with questions, objections, and points of agreement. We refused to cling with pig-headed determination to opinions once held even if proved wrong. There was no shirking of difficulties, but to the limit of our powers we tried to grapple with the problems and master them; nor were we too proud, if worsted in argument, to abandon our position and admit defeat; conscientiously, honestly, and with simple-minded trust in God, we accepted the conclusions to be drawn from the proofs and teachings of Holy Writ.

(Eusebius, in *The History of the Church*, quoting Dionysius c. 200-c. 265, bishop of Alexandria)

The holy and divinely inspired writings are sufficient of themselves alone to make known the truth.

(St. Athanasius 296-373, *Orat. Contr. Gent. Tom. I*)

If you desire a new quotation, if you pretend to affirm anything besides what is written, why do you dispute with us, who are resolved to hear nothing, and to say nothing, besides what is written?

(St. Athanasius, *De Incarn. Chr.*)

What the Scriptures have not declared, you will never find.

(St. Athanasius, *De S. Trin. Dial.*)

It is a mockery to ask questions, or to make discourses, on that which is not written.

(St. Athanasius, *Epist. Ad. Serap.*)

In the Holy Scriptures alone is the instruction of religion announced—to which let no man add, from which let no man detract—which are sufficient in themselves for the enunciation of the truth.

(St. Athanasius, *adv. Gentes init.*)

These are the fountains of salvation, that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the oracles contained in them. In these alone the doctrine of salvation is contained. Let no man add to, or take from them.

(St. Athanasius, *Ex Festali Epistola XXXIX. Tom. II*)

Do not believe me simply, unless you receive the proof of what I say from Holy Scripture.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* A.D. 348)

Keep that faith only which the Church is now giving to you and which is certificated out of the whole of Scripture.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.*)

Concerning the divine and holy mysteries of the faith, even the most casual remark ought not to be delivered without the sacred Scriptures.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. IV.12*)

It is evidently a falling away from the faith, and a proof of great presumption, to neglect any part of what is written, or to introduce anything that is not written.

(St. Basil c. 329-379, bishop of Caesarea, *de Vera Fide*)

What is written, believe; what is not written, seek not to discover.

(St. Basil, *Homil. De Trin.*)

How can we use those things, which we find not in the Scriptures!

(St. Ambrose c. 339-397, *Offic. Lib. 1, c. 23*)

When we receive money, we do not trust to those who give it to us; we wish to count it

ourselves: and when there is a question of Divine things, would it not be a folly rashly and blindly to receive the opinions of others, when we have a rule by which we can examine everything? I mean the Divine law. It is for this reason that I conjure you all, without resting in the slightest degree on the judgment of others, to consult the Scriptures.

(St. John Chrysostom c. 347-407, *Homil. xiii. in 2 Cor.*)

’Tis from ignorance of Scripture that all our evils arise; hence the plague of so many heresies, hence our careless lives, our fruitless labors... They err who look not to the bright rays of the divine Scriptures, because they walk in darkness.

(St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Romans*)

Look for no other teacher; thou hast the oracles of God; none teaches thee like these.

(St. John Chrysostom, *Homil. IX in Ep. Coloss.*)

When you shall see the wicked heresy, which is the army of Antichrist, standing in the holy places of the church, then let those who are in Judea head for the mountains, that is, those who are Christians should head for the Scriptures. For the true Judea is Christendom, and the mountains are the Scriptures of the prophets and apostles, as it is written: “Her foundations are in the holy mountains.” But why should all Christians at this time head for the Scriptures? Because in this period in which heresy has taken possession of the churches there can be no proof of true Christianity nor any other refuge for Christians who want to know the truth of the faith except the divine Scriptures. Earlier we showed in many ways which is the church of Christ, and which heathenism. But now there is for those who want to know which is the true church of Christ no way to know it except only the through the Scriptures. Why? Because heresy has everything just like the church. How, then, will anyone who wants to know which is the true church of Christ know it in the midst of this great confusion resulting from this similarity, except only through the Scriptures? The Lord, therefore, knowing that there would be such a great confusion of things in the last days, commands that Christians who...want to gain steadfastness in the true faith should take refuge in nothing else but the Scriptures. Otherwise, if they look to other things, they will be offended and will perish, because they will not know which is the true church, and as a result they will fall into the abomination of desolation which stands in the holy places of the church.

(Traditionally ascribed to St. John Chrysostom, *glossa ordinaria 49th Homily, on Mat. 24*)

We deny not those things which are written, so we refuse those which are not written. That God was born of a Virgin, we believe, because we read; that Mary married after she gave birth to him, we believe not, because we read not.

(St. Jerome c. 347-c. 420, *adv. Helvidium juxta finem, Tom. IV. Part II*)

In those things, which are plainly laid down in Scripture, all things are found, which embrace faith and morals.

(St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* A.D. 427, *Lib. II, c. 9*)

The canon of the Scriptures is perfect, and in itself suffices to the full, and more, for all demands.

(St. Vincent of Lérins, *Adversus profanes omnium novitates haereticorum commonitorium* A.D.434)

The source of error is that when men are hindered by some obscurity in knowing the truth, they run not to prophets, or apostles, or evangelists, but to themselves.

(St. Leo, *Ep. xxviii to Flavian* 13 June 449)

Bring me not human reasonings and syllogisms, for I rely on the divine Scripture alone.

(Theodoret of Cyrus c. 393-466, *Dial. I. Atrept.*)

All things that are delivered to us by the Law, the Prophets, the Apostles, and the Evangelists, we receive, acknowledge, and reverence, seeking for nothing beyond these.

(John of Damascus c. 675-c. 749, *Lib. I. De Orthodox. Fide, c. 1*)

Most of the above quotations are found in *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* by Harold Browne, second edition, London, John W. Parker and Son West Strand, 1854; or *The Holy Spirit and the Church* by Charles Gore, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.