



# **The Reformation, *Sola Scriptura*, and Tradition**

## **(or, “The Bible Alone Authorizes, Yet the Bible that Authorizes is not Alone”)**

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# Introduction: Premises, Problems and Prospects



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## A. Premises of *sola scriptura*: 5 theses on what the Bible is:



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1. The word of God written in human words inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. In authoring the Bible God has also authorized it.
3. Word/discourse: something God says about something to someone in some way.



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4. Types of discourse exercise authority in different ways over different domains.
5. All biblical discourse is divinely authored and serves the same divine end.



## B. Problems with *sola scriptura*: five salvos:



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4. *“It is self-defeating”*
5. *“It detracts from Christ”*



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## C. Prospects of *sola scriptura*:



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## C. Prospects of *sola scriptura*:

1. The criticisms are mostly directed against a caricature, a “*straw sola*.”
2. *Sola scriptura* comes into its own in the triune economy of communication.
3. The gospel for Paul is of “first importance”; *sola scriptura* means “Scripture first!”



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# I. *Sola scriptura* and church tradition: exclusion or exclamation?



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## A. The definition:

*Sola Scriptura* = “*only Scripture, because it is God’s inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church*” (Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone*)



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## B. The context:

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2. Luther rejected *nuda Scriptura*, and so should we.



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3. The importance (but not final authority) of interpretive communities:
  - a. Contra the Roman Catholic *magisterium*
  - b. Contra Anabaptist *enthusiasm*
  - c. Respect for elder brothers (and church Fathers)



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## II. *Sola scriptura* and the Protestant principle and pattern of authority



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## A. A unique (and user-friendly) authority:



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## **A. A unique (and user-friendly) authority:**

1. Rightful say-so: the power to commend belief and command obedience.
2. The authority principle in Christianity: the triune God in communicative action.
3. God cares for the preservation of his word (e.g., covenants).



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**A. A unique (and user-friendly) authority:**

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## A. A unique (and user-friendly) authority:

4. God's authoritative word establishes right relations and human flourishing.
5. Scripture *alone* is holy, the divinely authorized means by which the risen Christ announces the gospel, administers his new creational kingdom, and imparts his light and life to readers made right-minded and right-hearted—fit for communion with God—through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.



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## **B. A truthful (infallible) authority:**



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## B. A truthful (infallible) authority:

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2. The clarity of Scripture: God is an effective communicator.
3. Scripture alone is infallibly true (utterly reliable).
4. Scripture is a vital ingredient in the triune economy of truth.



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## C. A supreme (but not solitary) authority:



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## **C. A supreme (but not solitary) authority:**

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## C. A supreme (but not solitary) authority:

1. The economy of authority
  - a. All authority has been given to Jesus Christ
  - b. Christ delegates his authority to the apostles
  - c. *Sola scriptura* is part of an “economy” or divinely given pattern of authority

## 2. Magisterial and ministerial authority: the role of Tradition



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a. *Sola scriptura* is not “solo” *scriptura*



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a. *Sola scriptura* is not “solo” *scriptura*

b. How canonicity and catholicity go together



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### 3. Creeds, confessions, and the role of the Holy Spirit





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- a. Tradition is “the method by which the Holy Spirit causes the truth of Scripture to pass into the consciousness and life of the church” (Bavinck)



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- a. Tradition is “the method by which the Holy Spirit causes the truth of Scripture to pass into the consciousness and life of the church” (Bavinck)
- b. Do not confuse *sola scriptura* with either *nuda scriptura* or *nulla traditio*



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### 3. Creeds, confessions, and the role of the Holy Spirit

- a. Tradition is “the method by which the Holy Spirit causes the truth of Scripture to pass into the consciousness and life of the church” (Bavinck)
- b. Do not confuse *sola scriptura* with either *nuda scriptura* or *nulla tradition*
- c. Scripture is materially sufficient; Tradition adds no new content



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- d. Scripture and Tradition as greater and lesser lights in the economy of light



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- d. Scripture and Tradition as greater and lesser lights in the economy of light
- e. The testimonial and ministerial authority of Tradition



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### 3. Creeds, confessions, and the role of the Holy Spirit

- d. Scripture and Tradition as greater and lesser lights in the economy of light
- e. The testimonial and ministerial authority of Tradition
- f. Tradition as interpretive helpmeet



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# Conclusion: *sola scriptura* and the church today



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- A. Scripture first in authority (but not entirely alone in the pattern).
- B. Why evangelical pastors should affirm catholicity as well as canonicity.



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# Conclusion: *sola scriptura* and the church today

- A. Scripture first in authority (but not entirely alone in the pattern).
- B. Why evangelical pastors should affirm catholicity as well as canonicity.
- C. In sum: not a solitary but a *singular* authority.



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