

Is The Bible The Ultimate Source Of Authority

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Source Of Authority?**

*Does It Have The Final Say
On All Matters?*

by

Don Stewart

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Does It Have The Final Say On All Matters?

The Bible claims to be God's authoritative Word to the human race. In both testaments we find that the writers believed they were recording God's actual words. This is what the Bible has to say about itself.

The idea that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God is not only accepted by Protestant Christians, it is also accepted by Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and various other groups. The difference between Protestants, and these other groups, with respect to the place of Scripture, comes down to one issue and one issue alone.

We now arrive at one of the most important matters which we will address: the extent of the authority of the Bible. The question can be simply stated, "Is the Bible the full, sufficient, clear, authoritative, and adequate rule of faith, or is there something else that the believer needs?" In other words, is the Bible enough? Is it the last word on every subject in which it deals with or do we need something else? Is there another source of divine authority? In this book, we will examine various claims to where ultimate authority resides.

We will discover that the Bible is indeed the final authority on all matters of belief and practice. The Scriptures are sufficient; nothing else is needed.

The Roman Catholic Church would not agree that the Bible is where ultimate authority rests. They contend that the Roman Church, rather than the Scripture, has the right to have the last word on all matters of belief. While they believe the Bible is God's divinely inspired Word, they do not accept the idea that the Bible alone is enough. They also believe and teach that holy tradition is an equally authoritative source. Furthermore, the Roman Church believes and teaches that it alone is able to properly interpret the Scripture and the sacred tradition.

Another issue we will cover concerns the papacy. We will look at the biblical evidence for the Roman Catholic claim that Christ entrusted His divine authority to only one of His apostles, Simon Peter. According to the Roman Church, Peter became the first Bishop of Rome and the leader of the entire church. We will find out that this claim of the Roman Catholic Church has no biblical basis whatsoever. We will conclude that the Bible and it alone is sufficient—the only standard for the believer on all matters of belief and conduct.

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Question 1

Who Speaks For God? Is It The Bible Or The Bible And Something Else?

This is probably the most important question that we as human beings need an answer to. If God exists, who speaks for Him? Are God's words to humanity found in the Bible alone, or is there another source of authority which we must also look to for answers to our ultimate questions? Where do we find God's words?

The Claims Of Scripture

From an examination of the Scripture we find that it claims to be God's Word to humanity. Many people would agree that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God.

However, they would not agree that the Bible alone is the final authority. It is the Bible plus something else. This may be additional revelation from God, in the form of other written works, or it may be sacred tradition. Whatever the case may be, the Bible is not viewed to be sufficient in and of itself.

Is the fullness of God's truth contained in the Scripture alone, or are we to look elsewhere? Does the Bible itself have anything to say on the matter?

The Doctrine Of "The Scripture Alone"

The Protestant position on the authority of the Bible can be summed up with the words "the Scripture alone."

Basically, the idea is that there is only one special or particular revelation from the Living God to the human race. This special revelation is found in the written Scriptures, the Bible.

The common division of Holy Scripture is thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. These writings are divinely inspired by God and they are God's only special revelation of Himself which we have today. Nothing else is needed. Thus, we speak of the Scripture as being materially sufficient for all matters of belief and practice. This doctrine is derived from the Bible itself.

The Doctrine Explained

The following points need to be made about this belief. Indeed, it is essential that we understand what it is and what it is not.

1. The Authority To Speak For The God Of The Bible Was Limited To Individuals Whom He Chose

It is important that we realize that God gave only a few select people the divine right to speak for Him. This occurred during a limited time in

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history. In the Old Testament era, this happened over a period of about one thousand years.

It began in the time of Moses, about 1400 B.C. and ended with the writings of the last of the Old Testament prophets, about 420 B.C.

In the New Testament era, the ability to speak for God was limited to those people who saw and heard Jesus. These individuals alone were granted special authority to teach His truth and explain His ministry.

The only exception to this was the Apostle Paul who was specially chosen by the Lord to bring His word to the Gentiles. However, he too was living at the same time as Jesus' apostles. After the death of the last of these people no one had the right to speak authoritatively from God.

From Scripture we find that Jesus made a number of special promises to His handpicked disciples regarding the proclamation of His message. For one thing, He promised that the Holy Spirit would supernaturally bring back to their remembrance all things which He said and did. We read the following words of Jesus to His disciples:

I have spoken these things while staying with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you (John 14:25,26 NET).

Here we have the promise of Jesus that His specially designated disciples would remember everything that He said and did. This would come about through the work of the Holy Spirit. Obviously, this promise was limited to those individuals who had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. They were the only ones who could testify to what Jesus actually said and did.

Jesus also promised that after He left this world the Holy Spirit would guide these individuals into all truth. He said:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth (John 16:12,13 NET).

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit would teach them things they were not able to receive at that particular time.

Jesus also said that these disciples would testify about Him. Again, the reason that the disciples of Jesus were able to authoritatively do this is because they had been with Him from the beginning. He said:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me, and you also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26,27 NET).

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When we put these passages together, we discover a number of important truths. The disciples of Jesus, those who had been with Him from the beginning of His ministry, would themselves have a unique ministry. They would proclaim His truth to the world. In doing so, the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth as well as bring back to their remembrance all things which Jesus said and did.

However, this promise, of necessity, was limited to this select group of men who had been with Jesus from the beginning. By definition, nobody else could claim this promise. Therefore, once the last of these handpicked men died the unique authority which they possessed died with them.

2. These Divinely Selected Individuals Composed Holy Scripture

The select individuals, whom Jesus chose, were the *only* ones who had the capacity, as well as the authority, to compose Holy Scripture, or to approve of others writing Holy Scripture. This is crucial to understand.

They would have been the only people in the unique position to write authoritatively about the life and ministry of Jesus or to approve other writings done during their lifetime.

After these men died, there was nobody who could testify with any type of authority as to what Jesus did or did not say, or do, or did not do. This is why written Scripture must end with them!

Consequently, Protestantism says that the Scriptures alone must be the final authority on all matters of belief and practice. This is true because the Scriptures alone are a product of this select group of disciples who had been with Jesus from the beginning or, in the case of Paul, one who had been given a unique calling by Him.

3. The Result: The Scriptures Are Sufficient, Nothing Else Is Needed

God has spoken to humanity during a limited period in history, and only through a certain divinely handpicked group of individuals. This has resulted in a set of documents which contain everything necessary for humanity to know about God. These sacred writings, now grouped as one Book, the Bible, are the *only* rule of faith and belief that God has given. In fact, nothing else is necessary for the believers in Christ to properly function.

Indeed, from these documents we know who God is, who we are, how we can be saved from our sin, and the way in which He now expects us to live. Consequently, in these writings, He has given us everything necessary.

When Paul spoke to the elders at the church of Ephesus, he explained the content of God's message in this manner:

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For I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole plan of God (Acts 20:27 CSB).

The plan of God had been taught to them. In other words, nothing was lacking. This plan is now recorded in Holy Scripture. This being the case, we can conclude that all other so-called infallible sources outside of Holy Scripture must be rejected. This includes other holy books as well as holy tradition. Every source outside of Scripture must be placed under the authority of Scripture.

Thus, the Scripture is where we find ultimate answers; there is no higher court of appeal. Why is this so? It is because the origin of Scripture is God Himself. Paul wrote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV).

Thus, the reason Scripture is sufficient is because it is God Himself who is the ultimate Author of the books of the Bible. No other source, either written or oral, can claim this sort of authority.

Summing Up The Doctrine Of “The Scripture Alone”

Therefore, from the evidence at hand, we find that God’s written Word was restricted to certain specific time periods in history when He spoke through His specially designated spokesmen. During these limited time periods God’s words were put into writing by individuals whom alone He chose. Apart from these limited periods of time, we have no authoritative written documents which have God’s divine authority behind them. It is crucial that we understand this!

This, of course, does not mean that God was not working during these other time periods, nor that He did not do or say other things during these time periods which are not recorded in the Bible. Neither does it mean that God did not reveal Himself to certain individuals during other periods where we have no written Scripture.

However, since we have no way of knowing to whom He spoke, or what He said and did apart from that which is written in Scripture, God’s truth for all humanity must be limited to the writings which we now possess.

Accordingly, this doctrine recognizes that God’s authoritative word to humanity is limited to the sacred writings which were composed during these unique times in history.

Thus, we conclude that there are no other sources of sacred truth apart from these divinely inspired writings which were given at divinely appointed times. The Scripture and it alone, contains the entire plan of God. It is sufficient to meet all of our spiritual needs.

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The Doctrine Of “The Scriptures Alone” Further Clarified

It is important further clarify what we mean about this vital truth about the “Sufficiency of Scripture” or the “Scriptures alone.” The following points need to be made:

1. The “Sufficiency Of Scripture” Is A Biblical Doctrine

Where is the particular verse, or verses, where the Bible teaches that it alone claims to be the sole infallible source of truth from God? Where does the Bible say that the Scriptures are sufficient and that we need nothing else to guide us?

This question is often asked to the Bible-believing Christian by skeptics. The answer is that there is no single verse that states this truth. Since there is no one single verse of Scripture which says that the Bible alone is the sole sufficient source of divine truth, then many people assume that the doctrine is not biblical, and therefore, it is not true.

However, this logic does not follow. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity is taught throughout Scripture, yet the word Trinity, or Triunity, is never once used.

Consequently, merely because the precise term “the sufficiency of Scripture,” or something like it, is not found in the Bible, it certainly does not mean that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is not there. It is *not* the specific terminology that is the issue.

The issue is this: Does the Bible teach that it is the sole sufficient source of God’s truth to the human race, the final authority on all matters of belief and practice?

To discover the answer to this question we must look at the entirety of the Word of God. When this occurs, we do find that the Scripture itself teaches that the final authority on all spiritual matters is that which has been committed to writing in the sacred books of the Old and New Testament.

2. The Bible Contains Everything That We Need To Know

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture says the Scriptures are sufficient; we need nothing else. However, while the Scriptures tell us everything that we need to know about God and His plan for humanity, He certainly does not tell us everything which we could possibly know, or that we would like to know. In other words, the Bible gives us sufficient truth but not exhaustive truth.

In fact, the Scripture itself says that it is selective in the things it records. John wrote:

Jesus worked many other miracles for his disciples, and not all of them are written in this book. But these are written so that you will put your

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faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. If you have faith in him, you will have true life (John 20:30-31 CEV).

In another place, John said:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25 NIV).

According to John, the author of the fourth gospel, Jesus did many other things than what John recorded in his gospel that were not committed to writing.

However, what has been recorded is sufficient for us. The fact that many things were left unrecorded does not mean that the Bible is somehow lacking, or insufficient to meet our needs.

In point of fact, Peter taught that believers have been given all things which pertain to life and godliness. He wrote:

As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3 NKJV).

The New Century Version puts it this way:

Jesus has the power of God, by which he has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. We have these things because we know him. Jesus called us by his glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3 NCV).

God has provided everything which we need. These provisions of God have been recorded in the written Scriptures and in them alone.

Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures contained all that is necessary to instruct us about the salvation provided through Jesus Christ. He wrote:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing those from whom you learned, and that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14 CSB).

The Scriptures contain everything that is necessary. It is a sufficient source of authority for humanity.

3. The Understanding Of Biblical Truth Has Continued To Increase Throughout History

This is a very important point. While the Scriptures contain everything that is necessary for the beliefs and practices of Christians, the comprehension of these truths has developed over time.

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As time goes by, we get a clearer picture about the truths of the faith. It is not that the Scriptures have changed; what has changed is our understanding of the Scriptures. Indeed, as more and more information continues to be discovered which throws light on the background of the biblical world, we are in a better position to understand the truths taught in Scripture.

In fact, we are specifically told that in the “last days” believers will comprehend things that were not understandable to previous generations. Indeed, Daniel the prophet was told why he would not understand certain things that he had been told:

I heard the answer, but I did not really understand, so I asked, “Master, what will happen after all these things come true?” He answered, “Go your way, Daniel. The message is closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many people will be made clean, pure, and spotless, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. Those wicked people will not understand these things, but the wise will understand them (Daniel 12:8-10 NCV).

Thus, when we speak of the development of Christian doctrine, or Christian teaching, we are not saying that new things have been added to the sacred Scripture, what we are saying that through further study and reflection, as well as the result of new discoveries in fields related to Scripture, we have a better picture of the truths contained in the Bible.

4. There Are Some Good Traditions

The Scriptures are the only divine rule of faith and practice. However, this is not to say that everything that has to do with tradition is rejected.

In fact, there is evidence from the New Testament that Jesus observed some of the Jewish traditions and customs that were popular in His day. Most likely He wore the same type of clothing as other Jewish men. We know from the testimony of the gospels that He observed many of the Jewish customs such as attending the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

What He spoke out against were the traditions which were contrary to the written Word of God. The mere fact that something had been handed down through time, or that it was the customary practice of the people, was not the issue.

The issue was this: How did these beliefs and practices compare to what God has commanded in His written Word? Therefore, from observing Jesus’ view about traditions, we find that traditions are not necessarily good or bad in and of themselves. It depends how the traditions compare to what God has commanded in His Holy Word.

One final thing should be mentioned. Even though certain traditions and customs were practiced by Jesus and the apostles, they were never elevated to the same authority as what the Lord has said in His written Word.

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5. **The Oral Testimony About Jesus By His Disciples Was Divinely Authoritative**

Before the New Testament was committed to writing, the message of Jesus was transmitted orally. Nobody denies this. The oral reporting by Jesus' disciples carried His absolute authority.

Therefore, the doctrine of “the Scriptures alone” understands and appreciates that there was a time when the message of Jesus circulated orally.

However, today the only access we have to Jesus' words and deeds are from the writings of His immediate followers, the New Testament. We have no way of accessing any of the oral teachings of the apostles which circulated at that time. Therefore, the written Scripture alone must be our guide. No portion of divine revelation has been preserved solely through oral tradition.

Protestant denominations do have conflicting beliefs on certain subjects. However, this does not mean that we need some other source apart from the Bible to settle these conflicts.

6. **The Believers In Christ Have A Mission To Our World**

While the Scriptures are the final authority on all matters of belief and practice, the true church, the genuine believers in Jesus Christ, do indeed have a role in fulfilling the mission which God has given to it. Paul wrote the following to Timothy:

If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15 NIV).

The true church is called the pillar and foundation of truth; it is in possession of the truth of God, the Holy Scriptures. However, the role of the church is to proclaim the message of the Scripture and to encourage believers to live according to what the Bible teaches. The role of the church is *not* to lord over Scripture.

The church has the authority to proclaim God's Word but the church does not have any authority to tamper with His Holy Word. The church has a role but it is the role of a “servant” to the Bible; it is not the “Master” over it.

7. **The Holy Spirit In Absolutely Necessary To Understand The Message Of Scripture**

This brings us to our next point. When we say that the Scriptures alone contain everything necessary for believers, we are not denying the unique role of the Holy Spirit in the proper interpretation of the Scripture.

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Indeed, the One who gives humanity the proper understanding and interpretation of the message of Scripture is the Holy Spirit; it is not the church. It is the ministry of the Spirit of God to teach believers and to lead us into the truth of God.

The Bible teaches that every believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul wrote:

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all) (Romans 8:9 NLT).

By definition, a Christian is someone with whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

In addition, Paul said that the Holy Spirit will remain with believers during our entire lives. Paul also wrote:

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—in Him when you believed—were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13,14 CSB).

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that the Lord will give us the understanding of His truth:

Think about what I am saying. The Lord will give you understanding in all these things (2 Timothy 2:7 NLT).

This understanding comes from the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we need both the infallible source of truth, the Bible, as well as the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God to properly understand the things contained in Scripture.

Thus, while the Scriptures contain everything necessary, they cannot be properly understood apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Therefore, the doctrine of “the Scriptures alone” recognizes the need for the Holy Spirit to guide and teach those who have trusted Christ as their Savior.

8. Genuine Christians Will Not Necessarily Agree On Every Point Of Doctrine

Finally, the fact that the Scriptures are sufficient does not necessarily mean that every believer in Jesus Christ will hold to the exact same viewpoint on every doctrinal issue. On the key issues, there is agreement among Bible-believers.

However, there are many matters in which the Bible does not give us sufficient information to come to a definite conclusion. This does not mean that the Scriptures are somehow deficient. In some cases, it simply

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means that God did not believe that it was necessary for us to know about these things.

In these cases, humans should not attempt to fill in the areas which God has left blank. In other cases, it is not that God hasn't revealed His truth on the subject, the problem is that certain individuals have not studied the subject carefully enough. Whatever the case may be, the problem does not lie in the insufficiency of Scripture.

With this brief description of the doctrine of "the Scripture alone," we find that it is consistent with what God has said about Himself in His Word. By definition, we are limited to the written Scripture in order to know who God is, who we are, and what He wants from us.

Consequently, the Bible alone must be the final source of authority on all matters of belief and practice.

Summary To Question 1: Who Speaks For God? Is It The Bible Or The Bible And Something Else?

The most important question today is who speaks for God? Is it the Bible alone or the Bible and something else? The Protestant view, which is the biblical view, is that the Bible and it alone is the final authority on all matters of belief and practice.

The idea that the Bible alone is the final authority on all matters of belief and practice can be summed up with the words "the Scriptures alone." The idea is derived from what the Bible has to say about itself. As we study the Scripture, we find that God's truth, as far as modern-day humanity is concerned, is limited to what was written down during specific time periods in history.

Consequently, the only certainty we can have about God and His plan for us can be found in these writings alone. No other source has any divine authority. Therefore, we are limited to the written Scripture and to it alone, to determine what we should believe about God and how we are to behave toward Him.

Because of its importance, this doctrine must be properly understood. Therefore, a number of misconceptions must be cleared up. For one thing, while the term the "sufficiency of Scripture" is not found in the Bible, this is what the Scripture teaches about itself. The idea of the Scripture alone basically sums up what the Bible has to say about its own nature.

We must also recognize the fact that the Bible does not give us exhaustive truth about God; it merely provides us with sufficient truth. It tells us all we need to know about who God is, who we are, and how we can personally know Him.

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Furthermore, it also recognizes that the understanding of doctrines has developed throughout history. While the truths of Scripture have never changed, our understanding has developed as our knowledge grows.

In addition, those who believe in the idea that the Scriptures alone are our only infallible guide are not against all tradition; it is only those traditions which contradict the Word of God. Traditions must always be examined in light of the teachings of the Word of God.

There is something else. It is recognized that there was a time when the teachings of Jesus were transmitted orally. Yet, today the only access we have to Jesus' words and deeds is from what was written down by His handpicked disciples.

All of this does not mean that believers in Jesus Christ will agree on all points of doctrine. There will be areas which Bible-believing Christians will disagree. However, on these essentials of the faith there is no disagreement among those who recognize Jesus for the One whom He claimed to be.

Furthermore, this doctrine does not remove the role of the church in proclaiming and teaching the message of Christ. However, it understands that the role of the church is one of a servant to the Scriptures, not the lord and master over it.

Finally, it recognizes that the Scriptures can only be properly understood by the work of the Holy Spirit. He indwells all believers and guides them into the truth of God's Word.

While the Scriptures are indeed sufficient, they can only be properly understood through the teaching work of the Spirit of God. This sums up the biblical doctrine of the Scripture alone is our ultimate guide.

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Question 2

What Are Some Non-Biblical Alternatives As To Where Ultimate Authority Comes From?

The Christian faith believes and teaches that God has chosen to address the human race by means of a written Scripture, the Bible. The authority of the Bible is at the very center of the defense of Christianity. This being the case, it is only logical that the Bible is also at the very center of the attacks against the Christian faith.

Consequently, we find that there are a variety of other alternative ways in which people have approached the issue of ultimate authority apart from Holy Scripture. Each of these views denies that the Bible is the final authoritative source on all matters of which it speaks. It is important that we understand these various approaches to ultimate authority and what they are saying.

Those Who Reject Scripture Substitute The Following Alternatives In Its Place

These non-biblical approaches, as to where ultimate authority comes from, include the following.

Alternative 1. Human Reason

For many people, human reason, or rationalism, is the final source of authority on all matters. Human beings are the ones who are the final determiners of what is true and what is not. They believe there is no outside source of authority to determine what truth is. When this is applied to the Bible, it denies that God has revealed Himself to humanity.

Under this approach the Bible is not viewed as authoritative but rather as a piece of religious literature. Agnostics, atheists, as well as theological liberals would fall into this category.

Response To Human Reason Being The Ultimate Authority

Human reason, as brilliant as it may be, is always limited. Even the best human minds are pathetically limited in what they know, or even can know. Human reason, therefore, is an inadequate way to establish authority in any realm.

In addition, Scripture says that human reason, unaided by the Holy Spirit, cannot understand spiritual things. Paul wrote:

The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14 NET).

The Bible says the Scriptures are to judge humanity - humanity is not to judge the Scriptures. We read in the Book of Hebrews:

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For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12,13 NKJV).

Whenever human beings reject any part of Scripture, they are placing themselves as a higher authority than God. It is not possible to correct something unless there is a higher or more accurate authority to make the correction. Therefore, when someone corrects Scripture, they are saying that they have a greater knowledge of the subject than God. This is a tragic position to hold. Unaided human reason cannot speak with final authority on any matter. We do not have that capability.

Alternative 2. Personal Feelings

Some people have developed their theories of ultimate authority purely upon human feelings. This is usually as a reaction to human reason being the final source of authority. Since our knowledge is limited, and not always reliable, humans must resort to feelings to determine what is true.

Therefore, experience, not reason, becomes the final judge of all matters.

Response To Personal Feelings As Authoritative

Personal feelings also place the final source of authority somewhere apart from the Bible. Feelings can be misleading – they are not always an accurate guide as to what is true. Furthermore, what if two people have different feelings about the same issue? Who, or what, determines what is correct? Appealing to personal feelings does not solve the authority problem.

Human nature, either in its reasoning process, or personal feelings, becomes the final source of authority for these first two perspectives. However, the Bible says that the human mind is hostile to God. Paul wrote:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind controlled by the sinful nature is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8 NIV).

Consequently, humans should never make themselves the final word on any matter. They do not have that ability.

Alternative 3. Neoorthodoxy (An Encounter With Christ)

Neoorthodoxy means the “new orthodoxy.” It is a religious point of view that places the final authority in Jesus Christ, not humanity. However, the Neoorthodox position is that the Bible is not an infallible guide to all

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matters of faith and practice. It believes that it contains misstatements and errors.

The Bible is only a witness to the Word of God. It only becomes authoritative at the moment it speaks to the individual. Each individual must determine what is, as well as what is not, the Word of God within the pages of Scripture.

Consequently, it makes the believers personal experience with Christ as the final determiner of what is true and what is not.

Response To Neoorthodoxy

If one relies on personal experience alone, even while acknowledging Jesus Christ, there is no ultimate standard of authority. We again have the problem of what to do when two people disagree on a certain issue. There is no way of knowing whom, if anyone, is right about the matter.

Although believers have the Holy Spirit to guide them, they are still fallen human beings. Each of us has a different temperament as well as different amounts of training. Therefore, the understanding that the Holy Spirit gives each believer varies from person to person. The existence of the different Christian denominations proves this point.

Alternative 4. The Church Alone Has Final Authority

There is the perspective that Jesus entrusted all authority to the church on the earth. He gave this authority to His immediate disciples who passed it on to others. As the years went by, and different situations have arisen, it is the church that has the authority to say what is right and what is wrong—not the Bible. Therefore, it does not matter what any individual thinks may be right or wrong, it only matters what the church says. Ultimately, right and wrong are officially determined by the church, and by its authoritative pronouncements.

This position is held by the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian, Syrian, Coptic, as well as other churches deriving from Christian antiquity. All of these groups accept the Bible as well as the living tradition of their church as having ultimate authority.

Response To The Church Alone Is The Final Authority

There are a number of problems with placing the authority of the church over the authority of Scripture.

First, there is no biblical basis whatsoever for this position. Second, what happens when the two conflict? Third, the Bible warns us about placing tradition over the authority of Scripture.

Finally, the Bible did exist before the church—the Old Testament.

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God Did Not Entrust His Final Authority To The Church

To begin with, there is no Scriptural basis for the belief that any human organization would continue to carry God's absolute authority. The authority of Jesus was given to His immediate disciples; not to anyone else. There is no passage in Scripture that teaches the authority of Jesus was passed down from His immediate disciples to others.

What Happens When The Church And Scripture Conflict?

There is another issue. What happens when Scripture and the church conflict as they so often have in the past? Who are we to believe? Is it the church, or is it the Bible? Furthermore, which church do we believe? Is it the Roman Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox, or one of the other ancient communities? They do not agree on every issue.

Since there cannot be two infallible sources of truth which disagree with each other, somebody must be wrong.

Scripture Should Not Be Placed Under Church Tradition

Another problem with this approach is that it places tradition over the Scriptures. Scripture does not allow for this. Jesus repeatedly chided the religious leaders for putting ungodly human traditions over the Word of God. We read in Matthew:

Then Pharisees and experts in the law came from Jerusalem to Jesus and said, "Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:1-3 NET).

Jesus contrasted the written Word with their ungodly traditions. He was critical of the idea that human tradition was elevated to a place superior to Scripture.

The Bible does teach that certain traditions do have their place. Paul wrote:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold on to the traditions that we taught you, whether by speech or by letter (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NET).

Yet, in this context, tradition refers to the teachings of the Apostles; whether oral or written. From Paul's statement, we find that some of the apostolic teaching had already been committed to writing.

The written Word of God has always been the final authority for God's people. Traditions, whether oral or written, can only be accepted if they conform to what God has previously revealed.

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Each Individual Is Responsible To Study God's Word

Another point that should be emphasized is that the Bible says that each individual is responsible for studying the Scripture on his or her own. Paul wrote to Timothy:

Do your best to present yourself to God as a tried-and-true worker who isn't ashamed to teach the word of truth correctly (2 Timothy 2:15 God's Word).

Believers are to study the Scripture for themselves—not wait for some authority to tell them what to believe. The New Testament nowhere teaches that the church is the final authority on all matters of doctrine and practice. It is only the Scriptures themselves that constitute God's final Word to humanity.

God's Truth Existed In Scripture Before The Church Existed: The Old Testament

Finally, the truth of God existed before the church in the form of the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures, along with the words of Jesus, and the teachings of the apostles, was the final authority for the first Christians – it was not the declarations of the church.

Therefore, the church has no claims over the Bible.

All Church Teaching Needs To Be Evaluated

Having said this, we are not saying that all decisions that have been made by the “mind of the church” were wrong. To the contrary, the statements that came out of the ancient church councils were extremely helpful in defining and summarizing Christian truth. Also, the fact that each believer is personally responsible to study the Scripture does not mean that they should ignore what the church has taught for two thousand years. There are certain beliefs that Christians, from every generation, have embraced. These truths do not change with time.

Therefore, we must be careful when we say “the mind of the church” has no authority. What we are emphasizing is that everything which is taught should be evaluated by the Word of God.

Alternative 5. Further Revelation That Adds To The Bible

Many non-Christian cults add further revelation apart from the Bible. This so-called revelation is considered as authoritative as or even more authoritative than Scripture. They add to God's Word with their so-called revelation. The final source of authority is that particular revelation, not the Bible.

Although they may claim to believe the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, it is always interpreted in light of the further revelation or the

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teachings that come from their particular center of authority. In some cases, it is the teachings of only one person.

Response To The Idea Of Further Revelation From God

The problem with this perspective is that the teaching from the additional revelation always contradicts the Scripture at some point—usually at many points. Both cannot be true at the same time. Either the Bible is incorrect, or the teaching of the additional revelation is incorrect.

Furthermore, additional revelation is not necessary because the faith has been once-and-for-all delivered to the believers. Jude wrote:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3 NKJV).

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

My dear friends, I really wanted to write you about God's saving power at work in our lives. But instead, I must write and ask you to defend the faith that God has once for all given to his people (Jude 3 CEV).

God has once and for all given His truth to the world. Nothing more is necessary to be revealed to humanity.

Alternative 6: The Bible Is One Of Many Sacred Books

In some religious groups, the Bible is considered as a divinely given revelation. However, it is looked at as one of many sacred books that humanity has received. There is also the belief that God has revealed further truth after the New Testament.

Therefore, the Bible does not have absolute authority. The ultimate authority lies in these works that have been written after the completion of Scripture.

Response To The Bible Is One Of Many Sacred Books

Holy Scripture is not one of many divine revelations that have been given to humanity; it is the only one. The Bible warns about adding or subtracting to what the God of the Bible has revealed. Moses wrote the following:

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you (Deuteronomy 4:2 NET).

Nothing can be added or subtracted to what the one, true, God has revealed to humanity.

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Despite the claims, there is no evidence whatsoever, that God has revealed Himself to humanity after the New Testament was completed.

Alternative 7: The Bible's Authority Is Now Out-Of-Date

Another perspective concerning the Bible's authority is its rejection by modern humanity. The Bible may have been adequate for those in the ancient world, but it is out-of-date for those of us living in modern times. Because times have changed, modern humankind does not have to accept everything in Scripture as true. People can feel free to pick and choose which parts they believe and obey.

Response To The Idea That The Bible's Authority Is Now Out Of Date

This view assumes that our modern thinking is correct, and the Bible is wrong. If God has revealed Himself in a written record, then it should be for all places and all times, not just the ancient world. Why would He reveal His truth to one generation, and not to the next?

If each human can personally choose what they wish to believe in Scripture, then all the authority is stripped from it. The end result is a mixture of a number of different belief systems, but it certainly isn't the Christian faith.

Furthermore, the Bible makes it clear that God's Word has been "settled in heaven." The psalmist wrote:

Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89 NKJV).

The New Century Version puts it this way:

LORD, your word is everlasting; it continues forever in heaven (Psalm 119:89 NCV).

Response To These Viewpoints That Deny The Authority Of Scripture

All of the above alternatives are less than what the Scripture says about its own authority. The Bible alone—not human reason, popes, or church councils—solves questions over Christian doctrine.

Apart from the Scripture, Christians have no other written document or source of authority for their faith. The Bible alone is the sole basis for teaching, proclamation of the faith, evangelism, missions, and Christian conduct.

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Summary To Question 2 What Are Some Non-Biblical Alternatives As To Where Ultimate Authority Comes From?

While the Scripture clearly teaches that it alone is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice, there are other approaches that people continue to take that are at odds with this view. This includes those who make human reason as the final authority on all matters.

Others place their own feelings as the source of truth. Neoorthodoxy, while acknowledging Christ, rejects the Scriptures as an infallible source. There are those who place the final authority in the church, rather than the Scriptures. Many of the cults have a separate revelation apart from the Bible.

There are some who accept the Bible as one of many revelations from God. Also there are others who believe the Bible once had authority but does not hold absolute truth for modern humanity.

All of these approaches fall short of what the Bible teaches about God and how He has revealed Himself to humanity. The final authority must alone rest in the divinely inspired Word of God. No other source provides reliable answers to the basic questions that human beings continuously ask.

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Question 3

Where Do Protestants And Roman Catholics Differ On The Question Of The Authority Of The Scripture?

Roman Catholics and Protestants both claim to believe the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God. While there are a number of things in which they are in agreement about, there are also things in which they disagree. It is important that we understand exactly what the agreements and disagreements consist of.

In fact, the main thing which separates Protestants and Roman Catholics is this issue of where ultimate authority comes from. Protestants believe that the Bible and it alone is the final authority on all matters of belief and practice. Roman Catholics have a different perspective on this issue. They do not believe that Scripture alone is the final authority. They believe the Bible is only one channel of divine revelation which God has revealed to humanity.

To understand the differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics on this issue, we can make the following comparisons and observations about their beliefs on the matter of ultimate authority.

1. Protestants and Roman Catholics Hold To The Same Books In The New Testament But Disagree About The Old Testament

The Protestant Church and Roman Catholic Church both agree that the Scriptures are the divinely inspired Word of God. Protestants and Roman Catholics hold to the exact same books as New Testament Scripture while Roman Catholics add a number of books to the Old Testament which Protestants reject. Therefore, there is no agreement as to which writings make up the written Word of God to the human race.

2. There Have Been No Divinely Inspired Writings After The New Testament Period

Both Protestants and Roman Catholics agree that after the New Testament era there was no more divine revelation from God that took the form of written documents. Authoritative Scripture ended with the death of the apostles.

3. Protestants Accept Scripture Alone As Authoritative While Roman Catholicism Adds Holy Tradition

Protestants believe that the Scripture alone is enough for believers; nothing else is needed. Roman Catholicism says that not all of the revelation which was given to the apostles was committed to writing. Some of it was transmitted orally. Sacred oral tradition consists of the spoken words of inspired people. Roman Catholicism believes that the church has preserved this oral tradition.

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Therefore, sacred tradition is a second form of authoritative divine revelation that is necessary to understand who God is, who we are, and how we are to behave. Thus, the Bible is not a sufficient source of divine truth because it is incomplete. The mind of God has been revealed partly through Scripture and partly through tradition.

The Roman Catholic Church goes even further and says that the Scripture and holy tradition cannot be rightly understood apart from the authoritative interpretation given by the church. In fact, they claim that part of this sacred tradition, which was handed down by the apostles, is that the Roman Church is the infallible interpreter of Scripture. It alone has the authority to properly interpret God's truth.

To sum up, the Roman Catholic Church believes the Bible and holy tradition are the two forms of divine revelation which God has given to humanity and these two forms can only be properly understood through the authoritative teaching of the Roman Church.

Since these two channels of divine truth can only be infallibly interpreted by the Roman church this means that whatever Rome says about any spiritual issue is the truth. End of discussion. Since there is no higher authority than Rome there are no checks and balances; no way to test the claims which the church makes. Thus, since the Roman Church alone speaks for God, we cannot challenge what it says; we must simply believe it.

They also claim a biblical basis for this belief in the authority of the church. Paul wrote to Timothy and explained the nature of the church in this manner:

If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15 NIV).

Since the church is the pillar and foundation of all truth, it must have the final say in all things spiritual. Therefore, Rome believes it is justified in the claims which it makes.

4. Rome Supports Its Claims By The Use Of Tradition In The New Testament

According to Roman Catholicism, the idea that holy tradition possesses an authority equal to Holy Scripture is supported by the New Testament. They usually point to a number of passages. For example, Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

But we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from any brother who lives an undisciplined life and not according to the tradition you received from us (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NET).

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The Thessalonians were to live according to the tradition which they received, not merely according to the written Scripture. The oral traditions were just as binding as that which was committed to writing.

Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians about the need of maintaining the traditions passed down to them. He put it this way:

And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ. I am so glad that you always keep me in your thoughts, and that you are following the teachings I passed on to you (1 Corinthians 11:1-2 NLT).

The traditions which Paul delivered over to the church of Corinth were oral traditions, not written traditions. Again, we find oral tradition given the highest level of authority.

Later in his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul explained the gospel message as something that was passed on to him:

I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said (1 Corinthians 15:3 NLT).

The gospel which Paul passed on to the Corinthians was first passed on to him. Again, this speaks of oral tradition.

In still another letter, the apostle Paul told Timothy to pass on the things which he had heard Paul teach. He wrote:

You have heard me teach many things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others (2 Timothy 2:2 NLT).

This refers to oral teaching, not written Scripture. The oral truth was to be passed on with the same authority as anything written by the apostles.

In another place, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the necessity of holding on to the traditions delivered to them:

With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter (2 Thessalonians 2:15 NLT).

Paul commanded the believers to stand firm on the traditions they were taught. He specifically stated that these traditions could be either oral or written; each had the same authority behind it. This clearly shows that there were oral traditions which were just as authoritative as the written Scripture.

Therefore, to reject these traditions as a separate but equally authoritative channel of divine truth is actually rejecting what the New Testament says about the issue. Consequently, the idea of a second form of divine

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revelation, apart from the written Scripture, is something that the New Testament commands believers to accept.

5. Roman Catholic Tradition Has Added Beliefs And Practices Which Are Not Found In Scripture

Finally, the importance of this issue needs to be appreciated. The Roman Catholic Church, in its appeal to holy tradition, has added many beliefs and practices which are not taught in the New Testament.

In other words, a person would not embrace Roman Catholicism by reading the New Testament alone. Oral tradition, as well as written Scripture, must be infallibly interpreted by the Roman Church to come to accept these beliefs.

These doctrines include such things as the adoration of Mary, the doctrine of purgatory, the sacrifice of the Mass, and the office of the papacy. Since one could never become a Roman Catholic by following the Bible alone, this issue is of the highest importance.

If sacred tradition is another channel of God's divine revelation to humanity, and if the Roman Church has this sacred tradition and it alone can infallibly interpret the Scripture and this tradition, then we need to know exactly what the Roman Church teaches so that we can know what we should believe.

Thus, the way we view these matters of the Scripture, tradition, and the authority of the Roman Church, has eternal consequences.

What Does The Bible Say About Scripture And Tradition?

Though the Roman Catholic Church places oral tradition on the same level as written Scripture we never find the Bible doing this in the same way as Romanism.

The Bible teaches that only the written Scripture is divinely inspired. Nowhere does it say that this type of tradition is inspired in the way in which Rome claims it is inspired. We can make the following points in our response to the Roman position.

1. Jesus Answered Questions By Quoting Scripture, He Never Cited Tradition

When Jesus was asked a question that needed an authoritative answer, He answered it with Scripture or His own authoritative words; He never answered a question by citing some unwritten tradition. For example, we read the following encounter in Luke's Gospel:

Just then an expert in the law stood up to test Him, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the law?" He asked him. "How do you read it?" (Luke 10:25-26 CSB).

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When the question of eternal life was asked of Jesus He answered the question with a question, “What is written in the Law?” The answer was found in God’s written Word. According to Jesus, the authoritative answers were in the Scriptures, not in any tradition which had been handed down.

In another place, Jesus illustrated how a person could know the truth of God. He said:

They have Moses and the prophets; they must respond to them (Luke 16:29 NET).

The answer to the question was found in Moses and the prophets—the written Scripture. There was no appeal to tradition.

The answer of Jesus to questions such as these is all the more striking because there were many oral traditions at that time which He could have cited.

Yet, He never cited any of these oral teachings as having any type of binding authority. For authoritative answers, one must go the Scriptures.

2. Jesus Came To Fulfill Scripture Not Tradition

In another place, Jesus said that He came to fulfill Scripture, not tradition. On the day of His resurrection, Jesus explained that His coming was to fulfill that which was written. The Bible says:

Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets (Luke 24:27 CEV).

Later, in the same chapter, we read the following:

Jesus said to them, “While I was still with you, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets, and in the Psalms had to happen.” Then he helped them understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44,45 CEV).

Jesus said the Scriptures spoke of His coming. Again, there was no appeal to unwritten tradition. While there were many oral traditions about the identity and ministry of the promised Messiah which were popular in Jesus’ day, Jesus cited none of them. His claims were always based upon that which was written in the Holy Scripture.

3. Jesus Warned Believers Against Traditions Which Contradict God’s Word

There is more. Jesus not only refused to cite tradition when He made claims about Himself, He also specifically warned the people about human-made traditions which contradicted what God has previously revealed in His Word. In fact, Jesus did not have one good thing to say about tradition. To

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the contrary, He rebuked the people in His day that placed unwritten tradition over the written Word. Matthew wrote:

Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, “Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.” Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? (Matthew 15:1-3 NLT).

Jesus contrasted the commandment of God with their human-made traditions. This again tells us of the existence of human-made traditions which were circulating among the people of God. In doing so, Jesus made it clear that we should beware of these traditions which are not God-given. Thus, Jesus, God the Son, taught that all tradition was to be subordinate to the things written in Scripture.

4. Paul’s Teaching About Tradition Is Consistent With That Of Jesus

The Roman Church appeals to the writings of Paul to place tradition on an equal level with the written Scripture. However, a close examination of what Paul wrote will reveal that he was not using the term tradition in the same sense that it is used by Rome.

For example, he warned the Colossians about human traditions which were not according to the teaching of Christ. He said:

Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body (Colossians 2:8,9 NLT).

When Paul told the believers to hold on to the traditions they received, this referred to divinely authoritative apostolic traditions which were handed down by Jesus’ specially chosen apostles. These were the truths in which they were to stand firm. He had the following to say about other teachings which did not conform to God’s truth:

Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11,12 NLT).

Obviously neither Paul, nor any of the other apostles of Jesus, ever encouraged believers to accept any kind of teaching, either written or oral, which would contradict the Word of God. Elsewhere Paul wrote:

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16 NKJV).

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Paul stressed the importance of preaching the exact truth of God; nothing more and nothing less. Therefore, any tradition that the people were to accept had to conform to the previously revealed Word of God.

5. The Traditions Had Already Been Handed Over To All Believers

There are a couple of other points concerning Paul's use of tradition which we should take note. In all of his references to tradition, Paul referred to traditions or teachings which the believers had already received.

Nowhere did he write about future traditions that they were yet to receive. In other words, the traditions had already been delivered over. This is in keeping with what Jude would later write:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3 NIV).

The faith had already been delivered. Nothing else was necessary. Nothing.

There is something else. The content of these traditions or teaching was in the possession of every believer in Jesus Christ. It was not merely in the hands of the leadership. Every Christian possessed these teachings. They were not limited to a certain select group of believers. The apostles taught the believers everything which Jesus taught them. They did not hide anything from the people of God.

6. Scripture Describes Itself As Sufficient

We also find that the Scripture is described as being a sufficient source of truth for believers. Paul wrote to Timothy the following words:

All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NIV).

Note that Paul said that the Scripture thoroughly equips Christians for every good work. Nothing else is necessary. The reason for this is that all Scripture finds its origin in God. He has given His God-breathed, or divinely inspired Scripture, to the human race. He has provided everything necessary for us in His written Word. He has made certain that our spiritual needs will be met.

7. To Appeal To Oral Tradition As A Separate Source Of Divine Authority Has Its Problems

There is something else which needs to be recognized. There are a number of problems when one appeals to oral tradition as a second source or channel of divine truth. These problems can be illustrated as follows.

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8. This Sacred Oral Tradition Is Never Defined Or Located

Rome appeals to oral tradition as a separate authoritative source of doctrine which is distinct from Holy Scripture. Consequently, they should be able to tell us the content of this tradition as well as where we can find it. However, Rome does neither of these things.

In fact, there is no separate existence of this alleged tradition apart from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, sacred tradition, as Rome defines it, ends up being the same as the teaching of the church. Since this is the case, then how do we know it is really genuine sacred tradition which they are teaching? Basically, we have to take their word for it.

Yet, we find that many of the teachings of the Roman Church actually contradict God's written Word. Therefore, of necessity, we must reject these teachings as originating from God.

9. The Word Tradition Is Not Used By Rome In The Same Sense As Paul

There is something else that needs to be mentioned. When Rome appeals to holy tradition, it is not the same thing as what the Apostle Paul meant when he referred to tradition. The concept of tradition, as used in the New Testament by the apostle Paul, does not refer to that which was additional to Scripture.

Rather it refers to that which was ultimately contained in the Scripture. It is the authoritative "teaching" of the apostles. Before the New Testament was completed, the oral teaching of the apostles carried the same authority as their written works. They would communicate with the believers either orally or in writing. Once the New Testament was completed and the last of the apostles had died, there was no more oral communication. The only teaching which was binding on the believer was that which was written.

Thus, the word "tradition" as it is found in the teachings of Paul, is neither the same concept nor the same content that the Roman Church now claims for itself. It has nothing to do with traditions about the papacy, Mary, or any other unique doctrines of the Roman Church.

10. We Have No Way Of Confirming The Authenticity Of This Sacred Tradition

The oral proclamation of Jesus' teachings by His hand-picked apostles was divinely inspired. Their spoken words carried the same authority as their written words. However, today all we have is their written words. We have no way of knowing the content of their oral teaching except from that which is revealed in the Holy Scripture.

Thus, the only access which we have as to what they believed and taught is found in the Scripture and in it alone. Therefore, even if some oral tradition from the apostles was passed down, we have no way of knowing what it is.

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Furthermore, it is unnecessary. Since the Scriptures are materially sufficient, telling us everything that we need to know about God, oral tradition is unnecessary as a second source of divine revelation.

11. There Is No Agreement Among Roman Catholics As To Whether Its Teachings Are Found In The New Testament Or Were Developed Later

It must also be appreciated that there is no agreement among Roman Catholics as to whether this tradition is implicitly found in Scripture or that it was handed down separately as a second source of divine truth. Among Roman Catholics there are two views. They can be simply summed up as follows.

Option 1: The Additions May Not Have A Basis In Scripture

The perspective, which most Roman Catholics hold, supposes that Rome has the right to add to God's truth found in the written Scripture with holy traditions which have been infallibly handed down to the church. They believe that part of God's truth can be found in Scripture while another part of it can be found in these sacred traditions. These sacred traditions have supposedly been passed down to the church apart from anything written in the New Testament. Together they make up the sacred deposit of God's truth.

Roman Catholics claim that this tradition does not contradict anything which is contained in Scripture, it merely gives us fuller insight into the truth of God.

Furthermore, the Roman Church would not feel the need to find these distinct teachings anywhere in Scripture. It was only later in history that these truths were made known to the believers through the church. Whether or not any of these teachings have any basis in Scripture is not what is important. Rome has the divine right as well as the responsibility to make the faithful aware of these teachings since the Roman Church alone is the guardian and authoritative teacher of God's truth.

Option 2: Every Doctrine Of Rome Is Already Found In Scripture

There is also what is known as the "doctrine of development." Some Roman Catholics believe that every doctrine which the church has advocated throughout its history can actually be found somewhere in the Scripture, at least in some type of seed form. In other words, everything which the Roman Catholic Church has taught about Mary, the papacy, purgatory, the mass, or any other doctrine, is based upon truth already revealed in Scripture. While the truth may be there, it was necessary for the Roman Church to further enlighten people on what the Scriptures were actually saying about these doctrines. Thus, one needs both the Scripture and the authoritative teaching of the Roman Church to understand these doctrines.

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While this view may seem to accept that doctrine of sufficiency of Scripture, it does not. The Scriptures alone are not sufficient. What is necessary is the authoritative interpretation of the Roman Church to properly understand these doctrines which are contained in the Bible.

Therefore, whether a Roman Catholic says that Rome has the right to add teachings which are not found in Scripture and then infallibly interpret them, or another Roman Catholic says that Rome alone has the infallible authority to interpret Scripture which contains all the doctrines taught by the church, the end result is the same.

The Scriptures are not sufficient in and of themselves. Indeed, something else is needed to properly understand the mind of God. According to Roman Catholics, what is needed is the authoritative teaching of the Roman Church.

Protestantism rejects this conclusion. We do not need to add Holy tradition as a second channel of divine truth, neither do we have to rely upon the Roman Catholic Church for their authoritative interpretation of what the Bible really teaches. The One who teaches us is the Holy Spirit. He takes the things contained in God's Word and makes them plain to us.

Conclusion: The Scripture Alone Is The Only Authority

If the sacred tradition of the Roman Catholic Church was actually supernaturally revealed by God then it would not contradict the written Scripture.

However, it does. If a person reads and studies the Bible as the only authoritative source of truth about God it will not bring about the same result or conclusions as reading the Bible and accepting the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. One of these viewpoints has to be in error. If, as the Bible teaches, the Scriptures alone are sufficient for all matters of belief and practice, then it should be the final authority. Nothing else is needed.

Summary To Question 3

Where Do Protestants And Roman Catholics Differ On The Question Of The Authority Of The Scripture?

Roman Catholics and Protestants do not agree about the place of Scripture in deciding the issue of ultimate authority. While Roman Catholics teach that the written Scriptures are the Word of God, they do not believe that everything which God wants to say to humanity is found in the Scripture. It is Scripture plus holy tradition where the truth of God can be found.

Basically, this makes Scripture under the authority of sacred tradition. The Roman Church also says that this holy tradition has been handed down exclusively to them and them alone.

Furthermore, it is also claimed that the Scripture, plus this sacred tradition, can only be properly interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church. This

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makes the Roman Catholic Church the place where God's final authority rests.

Roman Catholics attempt to demonstrate their claim from Scripture. They point to a number of places where the New Testament commands believers to follow the traditions they had received.

The facts do not support the Roman position. There is nothing in the teachings of Jesus which gives any support to tradition being some type of divine authority. Furthermore, the traditions Paul spoke about obeying were the oral teachings of the apostles about Christ. While the New Testament was being written the oral teaching, as well as the written teaching, were sources of authority for believers.

However, once the New Testament was completed, and God said all that He needed to say, there was no need for any oral tradition to be passed on. Any oral tradition which would have been handed down would certainly have agreed with what was written in the New Testament. However, we find a number of doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church which are not only absent from the New Testament, they actually contradict what the New Testament says.

Thus, the various differences that we find between Protestants and Roman Catholics, with respect to where final authority rests, is an issue that will not go away. Someone has to be wrong. As we have seen, the biblical evidence shows that it is the Roman Church and their practices which are contradictory to the teachings of Scripture. Consequently, their position on sacred tradition, as an equal source of authority to the written Scripture, should be rejected.

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Question 4

What Is The Roman Catholic Claim As To Where Ultimate Authority Resides?

The Roman Catholic Church makes certain claims about itself and the divine authority which it says that it uniquely possesses. These claims should be clearly understood by all. If the claims of the Roman Church are true, then the spiritual issues that are discussed among believers can be easily settled; just ask the Roman Church.

Protestants reject the claims of authority which are made by the Roman Church. Therefore, the Protestant response to these claims should also be made plain to everyone. Consequently, it will be helpful to outline the claims of the Roman Church as well as the Protestant position with respect to these claims.

The Roman Church Must Prove Their Claims From Scripture Alone

Before we examine that which the Roman Church believes about the issue of ultimate authority, it is necessary to understand that their position must be proven to be correct if we are to believe it; their word is not enough. For the Roman Catholic position to be true, all of their claims must be supported by the Scripture.

Unless it can be demonstrated that the Bible establishes these various claims, no one should be expected to believe them. Therefore, a careful examination of Scripture is necessary to see if what the Roman Church asserts about itself matches up with Holy Scripture. This should be our starting point.

The Roman Catholic Position Concerning Ultimate Authority

The position of the Roman Catholic Church, as to where ultimate authority rests, can be simply summed up by a number of points. They are as follows.

1. Christ Has Established The Church On The Earth

To begin with, Roman Catholics believe that the establishment of the church on the earth is something that Jesus Christ founded. It is His church. He alone is the One who founded it.

2. The Church Is A Distinct Society Of People

The church which Christ established on the earth is a distinct society; it is different from all other societies whether they may be religious or non-religious. In other words, the church is a unique group of people set apart from the rest of humanity. A person is either part of the church or he or she is not.

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3. The Church Will Always Continue To Exist

Christ promised that His church would always continue. There would never be a time when they would cease to exist. Nothing can stop this from happening.

4. The Church Always Exists As A Visible Society

The church is not only a distinct society that will continue to exist; it has been, and always will be, a visible society. From the time of the apostles, and in an unbroken succession until the present, the church has publicly existed as a distinct entity for the entire world to see.

5. The Church Will Be Free From Error

This visible church, which has existed publicly from the time of the apostles, has always been pure, free from any type of doctrinal error. It has not only been entrusted with the truth of God, it will always continue to proclaim this truth, and only this truth. In fact, it is incapable of error.

The New Testament says that the church is the pillar and support, or foundation, of truth. Paul wrote to Timothy:

I hope to visit you soon. However, I'm writing this to you in case I'm delayed. I want you to know how people who are members of God's family must live. God's family is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:14,15 God's Word).

The truth of God has been entrusted to the church and to it alone. Therefore, it is not possible for the church to make any mistake in areas of doctrine or teaching. That which the church proclaims is the truth of Jesus Christ. Thus, we have God's infallible presence on the earth.

The Church of Rome admits errors occurred among those who professed to be Christians but these errors did not infect the church. To the contrary, the church always rejected these errors and condemned them. Those who brought these errors into the church were sent away by the God-given leaders.

Thus, the church, they argue, has always been pure and without corruption, it has never changed its earlier views, or ever contradicted itself. All of the teachings the church holds, it has held since apostolic times without any variation. However, at times, the church has given fuller explanations and definitions to certain teachings.

Yet, in all this, they have been consistent in their teaching from the very beginning. Consequently, the promise of Christ, that the church would be pure throughout the ages, is established by the facts of history.

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6. The Roman Church Is That True Church The Bible Speaks About

The Roman Church believes that the Scripture teaches the church which Christ left upon the earth is His church. This church will exist until He returns. It is made up of a distinct group of people who would be continuously visible from the beginning. In addition, this entity will always be doctrinally pure and proclaim only His truth. This, they argue, is the New Testament picture of the church.

After this point is established, the Church at Rome then tries to prove that this one true church of Christ must be equated with it and it alone; they are “the” church that the New Testament speaks about. To support these claims, the Roman Church says that it has existed continuously from the beginning, it has been visible from the beginning, and it has been pure in its doctrine from the beginning. While other groups have risen for a time and then disappeared, the Roman Church remains. They see this as evidence that they are the true church.

From the point of view of the Roman Church, the church is thus defined as the congregation of all the faithful, professing the same faith, partaking in the same sacraments, and governed by the same lawful leaders which are under one visible head, the Bishop of Rome. Therefore, the true believers in Jesus Christ must be in subjection to the Bishop of Rome, who is the Vicar, or substitute, of Christ and the head of the church.

When the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope, who is the head of the church that Christ has established, makes authoritative pronouncements on areas of belief and behavior, he speaks *ex cathedra* (or from the chair). This means his pronouncements are immune from error. His words are the words of Christ.

7. The Bible Is Under The Authority Of The Roman Church

This brings us to the Roman Catholic view of Scripture. Because the church claims to be God’s continuing voice upon the earth, the Bible, like everything else, is under its supreme authority. The First Vatican Council gives the authoritative Roman Catholic perspective on the Bible. It said:

It is not from sacred Scripture alone that the [Roman Catholic] Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed,” but “sacred tradition [transmits] in its full purity God’s word which was entrusted to the apostles.

Sacred tradition makes up what is lacking in the Bible. Roman Catholics cite tradition as authoritative because they say it was appealed to by the early Christians in order to refute false doctrine and to settle doctrinal issues.

Therefore, from the Roman Catholic perspective, it is both sacred tradition, as well as sacred Scripture, which are to be accepted as the instruments used by the Roman Church in their decision-making process.

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However, it is the Roman Church itself which has the final authority because it is the custodian, guardian, teacher, and interpreter of the Bible, as well as the custodian and preserver of this sacred tradition.

Rome Claims To Be The Infallible Standard

Thus, we find that the Roman Church believes that the infallible standard of truth is the church itself. The Roman Church not only infallibly determines the proper interpretation of Scripture; it also supplements Scripture with additional traditions and teachings. It is that combination of church tradition plus the church's interpretation of Scripture which constitutes the binding rule of faith and practice for all Roman Catholics. Its interpretations must be accepted without any question.

To Roman Catholics, the voice of the church is the voice of Jesus Christ. In this way, the Roman Church places itself above the Bible in its authority.

Consequently, all matters of faith and practice are determined by their interpretation of the Scripture as well as their understanding of the sacred traditions which have been handed down. They also claim the authority to add further revelation that is additional to the Scripture but not contrary to it.

In the past, they have used this power to advocate such doctrines as the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and the infallibility of the Pope. They believe that all their major decisions have been consistent with Scripture.

The Bible Is Not The Final Authority

The result is this: the Bible is not the final standard of truth—rather it is the Roman Catholic Church and their infallible interpretation of it. They believe that the Scriptures are authoritative but they are incomplete. This is important to understand.

The Roman Church believes that God has more to say to humanity than that which is contained in the Bible. Oral tradition supplies what is lacking in written tradition, the Scriptures, and thus is an authority alongside of the Bible. Only the Roman Church can correctly interpret both Scripture and sacred tradition. And because sacred tradition is ongoing, Roman Catholic theology is constantly evolving. Thus, if we want to hear God's voice today, we must listen to the Roman Church.

This sums up the Roman Catholic position. They believe they are the true church. Consequently, they have the final say on all matters. Their authority is over everything, including the Bible.

The Protestant Response To The Claims Of The Roman Church

As we have emphasized, since both Protestants and Roman Catholics agree that Scripture is God's divinely authoritative Word, it is from Scripture alone that this issue must be settled. Thus, Protestants respond to these Roman Catholic claims from Scripture in the following manner.

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1. The Church Was Instituted By Christ

Protestants agree that the church on the earth was instituted by Jesus Christ and by Him alone. The church is His body. The New Testament makes this clear. There is no disagreement with the Roman Church here.

2. The Church Is A Distinct Society Of People

The church is indeed a distinct group of people that belong to Christ. They are different than those people who belong to other religions, those who are members of non-Christian cults, or those who profess no religious belief whatsoever. Thus, a person is either part of the church of Jesus Christ, or he or she is not. There is no middle ground here.

3. The Church Will Exist Until Christ Returns

Because of the promise of Jesus, we know that the church will continue to exist until He returns. He has made this promise and He always keeps His promises. Jesus said:

On this rock I will build my church, and death itself will not have any power over it (Matthew 16:18 CEV).

Nothing can stop Jesus' church from existing and no force has any power over it.

4. The Church Will Not Necessarily Be Visible At All Times

At this point the Protestants differ from the Roman Church. Protestants agree that the church can, and should be, a visible entity on the earth. This is not difficult to illustrate from Scripture. For example, we are told in the Book of Acts that the Lord added to the church:

And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved (Acts 2:47 NET).

The Lord added to the number of believers that were already meeting in the city of Jerusalem. This addition to the number of believers was something that was visible to all.

We also note that the Apostle Paul addressed his letter to the "churches" in Galatia. He said:

From Paul, an apostle. I was not chosen to be an apostle by human beings, nor was I sent from human beings. I was made an apostle through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. This letter is also from all those of God's family who are with me. To the churches in Galatia (Galatians 1:1-2 NCV).

Again, we are dealing with entities that were public and visible. There were a number of different communities in Galatia which were called "churches." There is no disputing this. The church was a distinct group of

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people who professed faith in Jesus Christ. This was all done publicly and visibly.

However, the Protestants disagree with Roman Catholics as far as defining the church as a continuous visible entity. While the church will always exist as the distinct people of Jesus Christ, there is nothing in Scripture that says that it must always be a visible entity. Protestants also speak of the “invisible church” or the “spiritual church” as well as the visible church. The invisible or spiritual church is made up of the true believers in Jesus Christ; those who have trusted Him as their Savior.

The people who belong to the visible or organized church may or may not be true believers. It is not enough to be a church member or to be in good stead with the church. To be a member of Christ’s true church, one must be regenerated or “born again.” The true church is made up of these people.

This does not mean that there are two churches--one visible and one invisible. What it means is that the true church is not necessarily the same as the visible church.

It is also possible that there are times when the church will not have some type of high-profile visibility. It is possible, even likely, that the public side of the church will not be apparent in various places around the world. This certainly does not mean that the church has ceased to exist, or that the work of God has somehow stopped. It merely means that it will not necessarily be on public display. Indeed, in a number of countries, where Christianity is outlawed or persecuted, the work of the Lord continues in a non-public manner.

5. The Church Is Never Promised Infallibility

The Protestants also take issue with the idea that the church on earth will somehow be infallible. There is nothing in Scripture that remotely teaches, predicts, or implies anything like this. While the church has been given God’s truth through the Holy Scriptures, and has the charge to proclaim this infallible truth, it is possible for fallible Christian leaders to misunderstand or misapply these truths. Church decisions can never be assumed to be infallible.

As far as the church being pure and remaining pure, this is actually contrary to what Scripture teaches. Peter himself wrote:

False prophets were among God’s people [in the past], as false teachers will be among you. They will secretly bring in their own destructive teachings. They will deny the Lord, who has bought them, and they will bring themselves swift destruction. Many people will follow them in their sexual freedom and will cause others to dishonor the way of truth (2 Peter 2:1-2 God’s Word).

Indeed, false teachers had already infiltrated the church during the time the New Testament was still being written. Jude warned his readers.

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Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 3,4 NET).

Instead of becoming more pure, the church will find itself engulfed with more false teachers and false teaching. This is exactly what occurred in the history of the church.

Therefore, the truth must be sorted out from error. However, in doing so, church leaders are never promised some sort of personal or doctrinal infallibility. History demonstrates that the church has rightly understood and applied God's truth at certain times, while at other times they have misunderstood and misapplied it. They have been anything but perfect.

The Romanists, on the other hand, cannot believe that the church could have been in error for as long as the Protestants contend; for one thousand years in the so-called "dark ages."

However, who are we to say what God would or would not allow when He has not committed Himself either way in His Word? The fact that the organized visible church was in darkness for a long period of time is not contrary to anything that is taught in Scripture. Therefore, the Roman Catholic idea of the continuous doctrinal purity of the church cannot be supported biblically or historically.

6. The Roman Church Is Not The True Church To Which Believers Must Submit

Protestants strenuously deny the Roman Catholic claims about the nature of the true church that Jesus placed upon the earth. There is nothing in Scripture that says that the church must always be a continuous visible entity that stands out in the eyes of humans. Neither does the New Testament teach that the church will infallibly proclaim the truth of Christ without the possibility of doctrinal error. This is certainly not the biblical view of the church.

Even if this were taught in Scripture, the next point, that the Roman Church is this true church, cannot be sustained either biblically or historically. Indeed, the Roman Church bears no resemblance to the church which is portrayed in the New Testament.

The idea that the Roman church has remained doctrinally pure cannot be taken seriously by anyone who has looked at the matter. This is even admitted by Roman Catholic defenders. The examples of the authorized leaders of the church falling into doctrinal error can be easily documented.

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Thus, there is no basis for the claims of the Roman Catholic Church as to the nature of the church which Jesus is building upon the earth, or the idea that they somehow are the one true church to which all true believers must submit. Both of these points, which the Roman Church must prove to be true from Scripture, are shown to be false. Therefore, their claims of authority are to be soundly rejected.

7. The Reformation Doctrine Of The Scriptures Alone: The Scripture Alone Should Be Our Guide

In the 16th century, the Protestant Reformers emphasized that ultimate authority did not come from the visible church on earth but rather from the written Word of God, and from it alone. It is the Scriptures alone that are the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. This is a correct understanding of what the Bible teaches about itself.

It is important that we understand the point of disagreement between evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics regarding the idea of “the Scriptures alone” as our ultimate guide. The question is whether Scripture alone is a sufficient rule of faith and practice. The Protestant view, and the biblical view, is that Bible itself is the only binding rule of faith and practice for all Christians. It is not only authoritative, it is sufficient. Nothing else is necessary.

The faith, which God has revealed to the world, has been once and for all delivered as Jude noted:

My dear friends, I really wanted to write you about God’s saving power at work in our lives. But instead, I must write and ask you to defend the faith that God has once for all given to his people (Jude 3 CEV).

Ultimate authority is not found in Christian creeds, church councils, or one single church leader, such as the Pope. It is the Bible alone which reveals the will of the living God.

As far as church tradition, whether written or oral, as having some sort of authority over spiritual matters, a couple of points need to be emphasized. First, a study of church tradition shows that it often contradicts itself. This fact alone destroys its claim to have any type of binding authority. It cannot be divinely inspired if it is contradictory. God does not oppose Himself.

Furthermore, church tradition often contradicts Scripture. This being the case, one would have to make the choice between the two: either the Bible or church tradition is final and authoritative. It is not possible to have two infallible lines of truth which contradict each other.

Since we find that church tradition is often self-contradictory, and the Bible is not, this conclusively settles the matter. The Scripture stands as the last word on all matters; tradition has no binding authority.

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8. Roman Catholic Do Not Like To Argue With Protestants From The Bible

There is something else that needs to be mentioned. While these issues, of necessity, have to be decided from Scripture, Romans Catholics are not fond of attempting to establish their claims from the Bible. For one thing, learned Roman Catholics realize that the Scripture does not give them any basis for substantiating their claims. In fact, as we have seen, a close examination of the Scripture will demonstrate their claims have no basis whatsoever.

Second, entering into a discussion from Scripture concedes the point which they do not want to concede. If this fundamental question, about what is the nature of true church, can be solved by investigating what the Bible says on the matter, then why should not all other issues between Roman Catholics and Protestants also be settled by appealing to Scripture? If we can solve our spiritual questions from the teachings of Scripture, then why should we look elsewhere?

The Roman Church contends that while the Scriptures are true and authoritative, they are incomplete. This is why we must look elsewhere to answer these fundamental questions. Consequently, they deny the idea of the sufficiency of Scripture.

9. What Roman Catholics Believe Should Characterize The Church

Therefore, we find that the Roman Church will usually pursue a different line in answering this, as well as other questions on these eternal issues. In their defense of Romanism, they try to produce general considerations from the Scripture that give us a general view of what the church should be like.

Thus, they conclude that there are certain things which should characterize the true church. These usually include the following four things: unity, purity, apostolicity, and catholicity or universality. They can be briefly explained in the following manner.

First, the church must be unified or “one.” Second, the church must be holy or pure in its teaching. Third, the church must have an unbroken connection to the apostles. And fourth, the church must be catholic or universal. Then, they argue, that only the Roman Church fits the profile of the church that is revealed in the New Testament.

Their argument can be summed up as follows. As described in the New Testament, and in the early Christian creeds, the church of Jesus Christ is to be unified, holy, or set apart from the world, apostolic, and universal.

The Roman Church is unified, holy, apostolic, and catholic or universal. Since no other church has these characteristics, or marks, then the Roman alone is this true church which the Bible and the creeds speak of.

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Therefore, if the Roman Church is the true church, then it and it alone speaks authoritatively for Jesus Christ.

The Response Of Protestants

Protestants would disagree that the church which is characterized in the New Testament is the same as what is found in Roman Catholicism. In fact, it is nothing like it. Protestants would agree that the church on earth should be unified, holy, or set apart for Jesus Christ, and be able to trace its beliefs and practices back to the apostles and be universal in scope.

However, they would not understand any of these terms in the same sense as Roman Catholics would. Why? Because the Bible does not understand these terms in that sense!

Again, we come back to the central issue. Are we going to use the Bible as our common source to discuss these issues or are we going to bring in other sources that do not have God's divine authority behind them? This is where the line is drawn.

Furthermore, even if it is conceded that the church on earth is supposed to be like the Roman Church claims it is to be, this certainly does not mean it is this true church. The Eastern Orthodox, or the Greek Orthodox Church, makes the same claims for itself. Why should the claims of the Roman Church be believed and the Greek claims rejected? On what basis do we decide which of these two ancient communities is the true church of Christ?

Fortunately, we do not have to make this decision. Neither the Greek, nor Roman Church, is anything like the church that we find revealed in the New Testament.

Therefore, we conclude that it is the Bible, the written Word of God, which is the final authority for believers in Jesus Christ. The Bible points beyond itself to the absolute authority of the living God.

Therefore, God exercises His authority in the churches through the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is complete, or sufficient, in that it contains everything the church needs to know in this world concerning the way of salvation and the proper way of serving the Lord. Nothing else is necessary.

Summary To Question 4

What Is The Roman Catholic Claim As To Where Ultimate Authority Resides?

The issue of ultimate authority is of the utmost importance. Believers in Jesus need to know where to go to discover final answers. The Roman Catholic Church, as well as Protestants, has an answer to this question. However, their answers differ. Romanism says that Christ meant for His church to be a continuous visible entity from the time He left the world until He comes again. They also contend that the church is to remain doctrinally pure during the time it is here on the earth. Therefore, the

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visible church on the earth will be that entity that provides the ultimate answers to our deepest questions about spiritual truth.

The Roman Church then claims that they alone are that church which the New Testament speaks about. Therefore, all believers in Jesus must submit to them because they alone have the final answers to these spiritual questions.

Thus, the Roman Church can speak infallibly on doctrinal matters. Because the church has been given ultimate authority by Jesus, it decides all spiritual matters; the Bible does not. The Roman Church believes the Bible is a true and authoritative document, but it is not sufficient. More is needed. Sacred tradition supplies what is lacking in the written Scripture.

Therefore, the Bible, along with sacred tradition, are merely the instruments the Roman Church uses to make its authoritative decisions about what is true and what is not. The Roman Church has the final say.

The Protestant Church rejects a number of these claims of Romanism. While it does agree that the church was established by Jesus and that it will remain until He returns, it does not agree that it always must be visible. There is an invisible or spiritual church that exists. These are the true believers in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the idea that the church on earth is supposed to be infallible is soundly rejected. Nothing like this is taught, predicted, or even suggested in Scripture. Therefore, the Roman Catholic view of the nature of the church is at odds with the New Testament. It is the Scripture, and it alone, that is the authoritative and sufficient guide for all Christians. The church on the earth must submit to the Scripture.

In addition, the idea that the Roman Catholic Church is the church that Christ set up, and that all believers must submit to it, is also rejected in the strongest possible manner. As stated, Protestants do not believe Jesus left any organization on the earth that is to be His infallible spokesman. Moreover, if He had done this the Roman Church is not that entity.

Protestants also take issue with a number of other claims of the Roman Church, such as church tradition having some type of authority. Church tradition cannot be any type of final authority for the believer because it has a number of differing viewpoints, many of which actually contradict the Scripture. Since tradition has shown to be self-contradictory, and the Bible is not, the Bible alone must be our final standard.

The doctrine of the Scripture alone, is the Protestant position and the biblical position. To decide matters of ultimate truth, we must go to the Bible and determine what it teaches; it alone is our guide.

Finally, we note that Roman Catholics do not like to argue these issues of authority directly from the Bible. For one thing, the Bible contradicts their position.

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Second, arguing from the Bible demonstrates that the Bible can indeed provide answers to these types of questions. This is something that the Roman Church will not admit to be true.

Therefore, when the facts are considered, it becomes clear that Jesus did not establish the Roman Church to be His infallible source of truth. His truth has been once and for all revealed in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. The Bible alone is the authoritative, complete, and sufficient guide which gives ultimate answers on matters of belief and practice.

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Question 5

Did Jesus Give Peter The Unique Authority To Speak For Him? (Papal Authority)

One of the crucial issues which divide Protestants and Roman Catholics, with respect to ultimate authority, concerns the question of the office of the Bishop of Rome, or the papacy. It is absolutely essential that we understand the various claims that are made and what is at stake. Consequently, we will look at the claims of Roman Catholicism, and what they must be able to prove from the Bible to establish their case for the existence of the office of the papacy. We will then consider their biblical arguments as well as the Protestant response.

The Claims Of Roman Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church believes that Holy Scripture plus holy tradition are the two sources of divine revelation which God has given to humanity. Furthermore, these two sources can only be properly interpreted by God's voice on the earth: the Roman church. Therefore, if anyone wishes to know God's mind on a particular subject, he or she needs to look at the Roman Catholic Church for the infallible interpretation of Scripture and tradition.

At the head of the church is the office of the bishop of Rome, or the Pope. The job of interpreting God's Word accurately has been entrusted solely to the Pope as well as those bishops who are in communion with him.

The Roman Church accepts as foundational that Jesus Christ gave special authority to one of His chosen apostles, Simon Peter. This authority has been passed on to others. The present Pope is in a continuous line of successors that goes back to Peter.

Today, he is God's unique spokesmen on the earth. Therefore, if Christians want to hear the voice of God, they must listen to the Pope. He has the authority of Christ and the jurisdiction over all believers. This office will exist until Christ Himself returns. This is the Roman Catholic position.

If the Pope is the pastor of all Christians, then it is important that we know this. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church claims that this position is the historic view of the church.

In other words, it has been constantly held from the time of Christ. Furthermore, anyone who denies the office and jurisdiction of the pope is placed under a divine curse. This briefly sums up the claims and issues regarding the papacy.

The Bible Must Give The Answer To This Question

To find the solution to this question, we must go to the Bible. Protestants and Roman Catholics both agree that the Bible is God's authoritative Word to the human race. We have this in common.

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Consequently, we should look at what it says concerning this issue. We will find that it has much to tell us. Church history, the decisions of church councils, and the decrees of popes do not enter into this discussion. The Bible must give us the answer. Does it teach that Peter was to have the place of honor and jurisdiction over the entire church? Is this a clear doctrine of Scripture as Rome claims? Does Scripture support their claim?

What Roman Catholics Have To Prove From Scripture

Since the Bible is authoritative for both Catholics and Protestants, there are a number of points that Roman Catholics must prove from Scripture for the doctrine of the papacy to be true. First, there must be proof from the Scripture that Jesus Christ intended to establish such an office as the papacy. This is primary. Unless this can be demonstrated, the idea of the papacy is an unbiblical concept and should be rejected.

Furthermore, it is not enough to establish such an office as the papacy exists. Next, it must be proven that Christ intended that this particular office was first given to Peter and to him alone. It must be shown that while he was living, he had jurisdiction over all of the apostles as well as all believers in Jesus. In addition, Peter must have died in the office of the Bishop of Rome. After his death, a successor would have to be appointed to carry on the work of Christ. This successor would have to have had the same authority as Peter.

All of these things must be proven by the Scripture for the doctrine of the papacy to be accepted. Otherwise, it should be rejected. Therefore, we can sum up what they must prove in two simple points: First, Christ invested Peter with unique authority that was not personal to Peter and this authority has been passed on to others until the present time. Both of these points must be established by Scripture.

So, we ask the following questions. Did Peter have a position of superiority over the other apostles? Was he given jurisdiction over others? If so, then was this authority to be passed down to his successors? What does the evidence say?

We will first examine the Roman Catholic case from Scripture for the primacy of Peter among the apostles and then the Protestant response to this idea. The evidence is as follows.

The Case For The Authority Of Peter

Roman Catholicism does appeal to the Bible to support the idea that Peter was given unique authority by Christ. Their biblical case usually contains the following arguments.

1. Peter Is Always Mentioned First In Every List Of Jesus' Apostles

Peter is mentioned first in every list of Jesus' apostles and is marked for special attention in Matthew's list. Matthew writes:

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Now these are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (called Peter) (Matthew 10:2 NET).

This has led many to believe that Peter had special supremacy as an apostle of the Lord. There must be some reason as why he is always mentioned first.

2. Peter Is Singled Out From The Rest Of The Disciples

There is also the fact that in the relating of the appearances of Jesus after His death, Peter is singled out from the other apostles.

In fact, Paul made it clear that Peter was the first apostle to whom Jesus appeared. He wrote:

He appeared to Cephas. Next he appeared to the twelve apostles (1 Corinthians 15:5 God's Word).

On the day of Jesus' resurrection, His disciples said the following to the two people who had unknowingly walked with Jesus on the Road to Emmaus:

They were saying, "The Lord has really come back to life and has appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:34 God's Word).

Again, Peter is the singled out as the first apostle to whom Jesus appeared. This is a further indication of his importance among the disciples of Jesus.

Indeed, before Jesus was about to die, he singled out Peter again. He told Peter and him alone that He would pray for him and his faith. Jesus said:

Simon, Simon, pay attention! Satan has demanded to have you all, to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 21:31,32 NET).

In addition, Peter was told to strengthen the other believers. This is another indication that Peter was to be the leader over all the other disciples of Jesus.

3. Jesus Changed Peter's Name

We also find that Jesus changed the name of Peter. Originally, he was called Cephas. Jesus changed it to Peter, the rock:

Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at Simon and said, "You are Simon, son of John. Your name will be Cephas" (which means "Peter") (John 1:42 CSB).

The change of Peter's name indicates his special position in the church. He would be the rock upon which the church was to be built.

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4. The Church Was Built Upon Peter

The clearest statement of Peter's authority was made by Jesus Himself. Jesus solemnly said that it was upon the rock of Peter that He would build His church. We read of this in Matthew's gospel. It says:

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it (Matthew 16:16-18 NLT).

Peter was the man whom Jesus chose to build His church upon. Nothing could stop this, not even the gates of Hell. Here we are told that Christ chose to build His Church upon Peter the rock.

Since the Roman Church sees Peter as the foundation upon which the church was built, there can be no true church without a foundation built upon him. The Roman Church concludes that it is the only legitimate church, since it alone can trace its lineage back to Peter.

5. Peter Was To Feed The Sheep

In the Gospel of John, Jesus singled out Peter to be the one person to feed the sheep of Christ. The Bible records the incident as follows:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17 NIV).

Here we find that Jesus set Peter apart from the other disciples. He was to feed Jesus' sheep. Peter fulfilled this task by becoming the first bishop of Rome and the leader of the visible church.

6. Peter Was Given The Keys To The Kingdom

There is more. After Jesus told Peter that the church would be built upon him, Peter was then given the keys to the kingdom of heaven by Jesus. We read about this in Matthew's gospel where Jesus said the following to Peter:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19 NIV).

The translation, God's Word, puts it this way:

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I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you imprison, God will imprison. And whatever you set free, God will set free (Matthew 16:19 God's Word).

The "you" in this verse is singular—it must refer to Peter. Thus, Peter is given special authority by Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church sees this as a promise of papal infallibility. Peter, and those who succeed him, would speak authoritatively and infallibly in this special office.

Indeed, we do find Peter exercising special authority on a number of monumental occasions in the history of the church. They are as follows.

7. Peter Commanded That A Replacement Was Needed For Judas (Acts 1)

After Christ ascended into heaven, but before the Holy Spirit came down upon believers in a special way on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and told the other disciples that a replacement was needed for the traitor Judas. Here we find him exercising his authority over the other believers.

8. Peter Preached The First Sermon Of The Christian Church (Acts 2)

Peter preached the first sermon of the Christian church on the Day of Pentecost. He is the one who first proclaimed the message of the risen Christ to the world. He had the honor of telling the world, for the first time, that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

9. Peter Opened The Door Of The Gospel To The Samaritans (Acts 8)

When the Samaritans, half-Jews, half-Gentiles, received the gospel, it was Peter who confirmed that they were one in Christ. He laid hands upon these new believers and they received the Holy Spirit. Again, his authority is demonstrated by the fact of him going to Samaria to assure these Samaritans that they were part of the New Testament church.

10. Peter Was The First To Offer The Gospel To The Gentiles (Acts 10)

Peter was also the first to offer the good news to the non-Jews, or Gentiles. He is the one whom the Lord sent to the Gentile centurion Cornelius to let him know about the offer of forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ.

Thus, we find that Peter was the only person who was at each of these great events in the early church. Therefore, the evidence is clear that Peter is the one who was granted the unique authority of Christ.

From the clear statements of Jesus, as well as from the testimony of the Book of Acts, we find Peter having been promised unique authority by the Lord, and then exercising this authority by bringing the message of Jesus to the three different groups of human beings: Jews, Samaritans, and

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Gentiles. It is obvious that the Lord marked out Peter with special privileges.

11. First Peter Was Written From Babylon (Which Is Rome)

As far as Peter being in Rome to accept his rightful position as bishop of that city, we find that the first letter of Peter was written from Babylon. It reads as follows:

The church in Babylon, who was chosen like you, sends you greetings. Mark, my son in Christ, also greets you (1 Peter 5:13 NCV).

This is understood to be a reference to Rome. In fact, the New Living Translation, which is a Protestant Bible translation, not a Roman Catholic translation, translates Babylon as Rome in this verse. It says:

Your sister church here in Rome sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark (1 Peter 5:13 NLT).

This is a clear indication that Peter was the leader of the Church in Rome.

12. The Fact That Judas Was Replaced Shows That The Office Of Apostle Will Continue

There is also the evidence for the continuation of apostles, or leaders in the church, apart from the Twelve. After Judas' death, it was necessary to replace him. Peter himself said:

For it is written in the Book of Psalms: Let his dwelling become desolate; let no one live in it; and Let someone else take his position. Therefore, from among the men who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us-- beginning from the baptism of John until the day He was taken up from us--from among these, it is necessary that one become a witness with us of His resurrection. So they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed, "You, Lord, know the hearts of all; show which of these two You have chosen" (Acts 1:20-24 CSB).

The fact that one of the apostles had to be replaced shows that their office would continue. This sets the stage for individuals to be the successors of Peter as Bishop of Rome and the head of the Christian church.

This Is The Roman Position From Scripture

This sums up the biblical case for the Roman Catholic doctrine of the papacy. If the papacy is infallible, in the sense which the Roman Church claims, then any commands issued by the office must be obeyed without question.

Since the Bible is acknowledged by Roman Catholics and Protestants as God's divinely authoritative Word, the Scripture must be the place where

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answers to these questions are found. If Peter was commissioned by Christ, then there should be evidence of this commission in God's Word.

Therefore, the doctrine of the office of the papacy must stand or fall on what the Bible has to say. No other sources, whether it is church tradition, church history, church councils, or the decrees of the popes, have anything authoritative to say on this important question. The Bible alone must give us the answer.

The Necessity Of Testing The Claims Of Roman Catholicism

Before we give a reply to the claims of the Roman Church with respect to the authority that was given to Peter, we must emphasize that we are responding to their claims.

In other words, Romanism has made these claims, and we are answering them from Scripture. Consequently, the Protestant answer should not be seen being some type of attack on Romanism or as being anti-Roman Catholic. Since they have made these monumental claims, we have a duty to respond to them.

In fact, we would be neglecting our duty if we did not respond to the claims that the Roman Church makes. The Bible gives a number of commands about testing truth claims. Paul wrote:

But test all things. Hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 CSB).

John wrote about the necessity of testing the spirits. He said:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1 CSB).

Jesus Himself warned about people falsely speaking in His name, or His authority:

Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles." But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!" (Matthew 7:21-23 CEV).

He also told us to be aware of false prophets. Matthew records Jesus saying the following:

Watch out for false prophets! They dress up like sheep, but inside they are wolves who have come to attack you. You can tell what they are by what they do. No one picks grapes or figs from thornbushes. A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good

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fruit. Every tree that produces bad fruit will be chopped down and burned. You can tell who the false prophets are by their deeds (Matthew 7:15-20 CEV).

Consequently, with these warnings from the New Testament, it is vital that we test all spiritual claims that are made, especially from those who maintain they possess the supreme authority of Jesus Christ.

Response To The Arguments That Peter Was Given Unique Authority

While the Roman Catholic Church believes and teaches that Peter had unique authority over the other apostles, the biblical evidence does not back this up. In fact, Scripture contradicts all of the main Roman Catholic arguments for the supremacy of Peter. There is no evidence that he ever held the office of the Bishop of Rome or that he was the head of the Christian church. None whatsoever!

The following points should be made with respect to the idea of Peter's unique authority in the church.

1. Peter's Preeminence Is Nowhere Stated By Jesus

To begin with, Peter is indeed prominent among the apostles. He was a leader among the twelve. There is no denying this. However, Peter's preeminence over the other apostles was nowhere stated by Jesus Christ. While Christ gave Peter the authority to open the door of the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles, there is no statement, or inference, by Jesus that Peter had some type of authority over the other apostles. As the first of the apostles to confess Jesus as the Messiah, He was given the privilege of being the first to tell the Jews and the Gentiles of Jesus' identity and mission. Beyond that, Peter was not granted any special authority by His Lord.

While it is sometimes argued that Jesus gave Peter some type of preeminence by changing his name, there is really nothing to this argument. Jesus also changed the names of other disciples: James and John. Mark writes:

He [Jesus] appointed twelve: To Simon he gave the name Peter; to James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee, he gave the name Boanerges (that is, "sons of thunder") (Mark 3:16,17 NET).

Consequently, the giving of a nickname or the changing of the name of one of the disciples is no sign of superiority over the others.

2. Peter Never Claimed To Be Preeminent Over The Apostles

Not only did Jesus not give any type of preeminence to Peter, nowhere do we find Peter himself claiming preeminence over the other apostles of Jesus. In the two letters that he wrote that have become part of the New

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Testament, we find nothing in them remotely resembling a claim to his special authority over other believers.

Peter Claimed To Be Equal To The Apostles, He Was Not Over Them

Peter himself declared that his position was no more than an equal to the other apostles. He wrote the following:

Therefore, as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of the Messiah, and also a participant in the glory about to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you (1 Peter 5:1 CSB).

Here Peter calls himself a “witness and “fellow elder.” He was one of many; he was not in a unique class by himself.

In his first letter to believers, Peter called himself a “slave and an apostle:”

Simeon Peter, a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those who have obtained a faith of equal privilege with ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1 CSB).

There is nothing here to indicate he believed himself to have a superior position over the other apostles.

Jesus Is The Head Of The Church

To Peter, Jesus was the Chief Shepherd of the church while he was one of the “fellow elders.” Peter himself wrote:

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:14 CSB).

If there is one thing which stands out in the New Testament, it is that Jesus is the Head of the Church. The church is portrayed as a flock of sheep with Jesus as the Chief Shepherd. Jesus Himself said that there is only one shepherd, Him. We read Jesus saying the following:

I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd (John 10:16 NLT).

Jesus, not Peter, is the leader of the church. Jesus claimed this for Himself and Peter acknowledged His claim.

3. Peter Refused To Be Treated Differently Than Anyone Else

We also find that Peter refused to be treated any differently than other people. When the Gentile centurion Cornelius attempted to worship Peter, it was Peter himself that stopped him. We read of this in the Book of Acts:

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So when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter helped him up, saying, "Stand up, I too am only a man" (Acts 10:25-26 NET).

Peter did not expect any special treatment from humans; he was only a mere man.

4. Peter Never Mentions Anything About The Papacy In His Last Letter

In Peter's second letter, when he knew he was about to die, he told his readers he wanted to leave them with some important truths of the faith:

And it is only right that I should keep on reminding you as long as I live. For our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me that I must soon leave this earthly life, so I will work hard to make sure you always remember these things after I am gone (2 Peter 1:13-15 (NLT)).

Interestingly, in Second Peter there is no command to follow his successors, no hint that he viewed himself as the leader of the church, no statement that he was the bishop of Rome. Why, in this dying declaration of Peter, are all of these things absent?

5. Peter Contradicted The Roman Catholic Position On The Subject Of Sacred Tradition

There is something else that should be mentioned. Peter himself taught that Christ has given us everything that we need that pertains to life and godliness. He wrote:

May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:2-3 NLT).

This is in contradiction to the claims of Rome that Scripture is somehow incomplete. If at the time Peter wrote this letter Jesus Christ had already given believers everything that they need, what therefore is the point of two thousand years of so-called holy tradition which the Roman Church adds to the Scripture? According to Peter's own statement, such holy tradition is unnecessary.

6. Peter Was Never Treated As Being Preeminent By The Other Apostles

There is still more. As we examine the New Testament, we find that Peter is never considered to be preeminent by the remaining members of the Twelve Apostles. Nothing in their spoken words, or in their writings, gives the slightest hint that he had any type of authority over them.

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7. Peter Did Not Lead The Council Of Jerusalem

There were a number of opportunities where Peter's leadership could have been acknowledged by these men. The best example of this is the council of Jerusalem whose meeting is recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Acts. If Peter was the acknowledged leader of the church, then we would expect that he would have presided over this important meeting. Yet, he did not. In this meeting, he is treated the same as the rest of the leaders that spoke; he had no special position among the group.

8. Paul Never Mentioned Peter As The Leader Of The Church

Furthermore, when the Apostle Paul wrote his various letters about the nature of the church, the position of Peter as leader was never addressed. This is incomprehensible if he was the head of the church.

In fact, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he said that Peter had been give a special ministry to the Jews, while he, Paul, had been given a special ministry to the Gentiles. He wrote:

On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised. For He who was at work with Peter in the apostleship to the circumcised was also at work with me among the Gentiles. When James, Cephas, and John, recognized as pillars, acknowledged the grace that had been given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to me and Barnabas, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised (Galatians 2:7-9 CSB).

Peter and Paul each had a special calling. There was a division of authority; not the authority of merely one individual.

In addition, Paul said that he was not inferior to the "super-apostles:"

I have become a fool. You yourselves forced me to do it, for I should have been commended by you. For I lack nothing in comparison to those "super-apostles," even though I am nothing (2 Corinthians 12:11 NET).

Paul considered himself inferior to no one; this includes Peter.

9. Paul Said The Churches Were His Concern

The care and concern of the churches was the responsibility of Paul, not Peter. Paul also wrote to the Corinthians:

Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28 NET).

Paul did not seem to think that the care and concern of the churches belonged to Peter alone.

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Therefore, the claims for Peter's papal authority do not make any sense in light of the New Testament evidence. It does not recognize Peter as any type of leader in the church. If his authoritative position as leader of God's people was part of the essential makeup of the church, then why is it never mentioned even once in the New Testament?

10. There Is No Evidence That The Papal Office Existed

There is still more. We find no evidence whatsoever that the Papal office even existed in the church, let alone Peter was the first Pope. Indeed, nowhere in the writings of John, Jude, James, Hebrews or Peter do we find the slightest hint of such an office. When Paul lists the various offices in the church in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 and in Ephesians 4:11-16, the Papacy is never even mentioned. He wrote to the Corinthians:

And God has placed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, gifts of healing, helps, gifts of leadership, different kinds of tongues. Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all perform miracles, do they? Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they? (1 Corinthians 12:28-30 NET).

If such an important office existed, then we should expect that it would not only be mentioned, but it would be emphasized. Yet it is never brought up by any of the writers. This is incredible if such a crucial office actually existed. Obviously, it did not.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that Peter was the Bishop of Rome in the modern sense of the term "bishop." That is, he was not the overseer of all believers. For that matter, the office of Bishop, in its modern sense of overseer, did not exist in New Testament times.

11. Jesus Said All The Apostles Had Equal Authority

While Jesus had the chance to put in place some sort of leadership structure among His apostles, He did not. In fact, He clearly stated that the apostles had the same level of authority—none was considered above the other. Jesus said the following to all of the apostles:

I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven (Matthew 18:18 NLT).

The word "you" here is in the plural; it is not referring to one particular person. All of them were given the unique authority of the Lord because of their personal relationship with Him.

In an answer to a question by Peter, Jesus said that each of the twelve apostles would rule in His kingdom:

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Then Peter said to him, “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?” Jesus replied, “I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:27-28 NLT).

Again, we do not find Jesus singling out Peter for special privileges. He will sit on a throne as will the other members of the “Twelve;” there was no special throne for Peter.

Jesus also answered the question as to who would be the greatest among the apostles. Luke records the following episode:

A dispute also started among them over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. So Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ Not so with you; instead the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. “You are the ones who have remained with me in my trials. Thus I grant to you a kingdom, just as my Father granted to me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:24-30 NET).

In His answer, Jesus gave equal authority to all of the apostles; none of them was singled out for special treatment.

There is something else which should be considered. Why did the disciples even ask the question if Jesus had already established Peter as the authority?

Obviously, they did not understand Jesus’ statement about the rock, as recorded in Matthew 16, as referring to Peter as the head of the church. If Peter’s authority had been established at that time, then Jesus would have rebuked them for later asking the question. Instead we find Jesus rebuking all of them for wanting some type of preeminence. He then said each of them would have a position of authority, not just Peter.

12. Paul Felt Free To Publicly Rebuke Peter

The attitude of Paul toward Peter is unexplainable in light of the papal claims. We find that Paul publicly rebuked Peter face-to-face. He records the following episode in the Book of Galatians:

But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him publicly, speaking strongly against what he was doing, for it was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who don’t bother with circumcision. But afterward, when some Jewish friends of James came, Peter wouldn’t eat with the Gentiles anymore because he was afraid of what these legalists would say. Then the other Jewish Christians followed Peter’s hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was

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influenced to join them in their hypocrisy. When I saw that they were not following the truth of the Good News, I said to Peter in front of all the others, “Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you trying to make these Gentiles obey the Jewish laws you abandoned?” (Galatians 2:11-14 NLT).

Paul certainly did not assume that Peter was some sort of supreme authority in the church. Paul called Peter’s behavior hypocritical because his behavior was not according to the teachings of Jesus. This would not be possible if Paul assumed Peter was the supreme leader in the church who spoke infallibly on spiritual matters. Indeed, in his own letter, Peter spoke glowingly of the wisdom of Paul:

Think of our Lord’s patience as an opportunity [for us] to be saved. This is what our dear brother Paul wrote to you about, using the wisdom God gave him. He talks about this subject in all his letters. Some things in his letters are hard to understand. Ignorant people and people who aren’t sure of what they believe distort what Paul says in his letters the same way they distort the rest of the Scriptures. These people will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:15,16 God’s Word).

Peter did not have any problem with Paul’s authority; the man who publicly rebuked him.

13. Peter Is Listed Behind James

Roman Catholics argue that Peter’s authority is shown by the fact that he is first on every list of the apostles. However, if one is considering the evidence of New Testament lists, Paul listed Peter behind James, the Lord’s brother. We read of this in Galatians where Paul wrote:

In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews (Galatians 2:9 NLT).

This certainly shows that Paul did not consider Peter above James. In addition, while Peter is mentioned behind James and ahead of John, they are all called pillars of the church.

This shows that Paul assumed that all three of them were among the leaders of the church, not just Peter. Again, there is no singling Peter out for any type of special authority.

With respect to the listing of the names of the apostles in the four gospels, while Peter was always listed first, he was the first among equals. He never held a position of priority over the others.

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14. Paul's Apostolic Mission Was Not Dependent Upon Peter

Paul himself made it clear that his apostolic mission was not dependent upon the authority of Peter or any other apostle. His authority was directly given by God. He wrote the following to the Galatians:

Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the Good News I preached to you was not made up by human beings. I did not get it from humans, nor did anyone teach it to me, but Jesus Christ showed it to me (Galatians 1:11,12 NCV).

There is no mention of Peter in the commission that Paul was given. In fact, Paul himself tells us that he only spent fifteen days with Peter in the first seventeen years of his ministry! He wrote the following to the Galatians:

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. It was from the Lord and from Him alone; there was no human authority behind it. . . Then after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking Titus along too (Galatians 1:18-19, 2:1 NET).

Obviously, Paul did not believe that his ministry was somehow directed by, or dependent upon, the words of Peter.

15. Peter Was Sent To Samaria, He Did Not Do The Sending

When Samaria had received the word of God, the church sent out Peter and John to go down and lay hands upon the people. We read the following in the Book of Acts:

When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had welcomed God's message, they sent Peter and John to them. After they went down there, they prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14,15 CSB).

Peter was the one sent; he was not the one doing the sending. The authority of the one sending is always greater than the one sent. Someone had authority greater than Peter in order to send him to Samaria.

16. Peter Did Not Preside Over The Council Of Jerusalem

There was an early council that convened in the city of Jerusalem to decide the relationship of Gentiles to the church. While Peter attended this conference, he did not preside over it. At the council of Jerusalem, after Peter, among others, had spoken, James said the following to the assembled leaders:

Brothers, listen to me! . . . Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those who turn to God from among the Gentiles, (Acts 15:13,19 CSB).

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If Peter were the supreme authority in the church, then these words of James would not make any sense. Yet as we read this account in the Book of Acts, the decision of the assembled leaders was to follow the verdict of James. As this incident is recorded for us, we find that Peter was the fourth from the last to speak. He addressed the group as a fellow apostle; not as the one in charge. It is obvious that he was not the leader at this council.

Whether or not James was actually presiding over the meeting can be debated. He may have been reflecting the consensus of all who attended rather than making the decision on his own.

From the context, it seems that he was speaking for the entire group because they made the decision. The Bible says:

Then the apostles, the spiritual leaders, and the whole church decided to choose some of their men to send with Paul and Barnabas to the city of Antioch. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, who were leaders among the believers. . . . The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to place any additional burdens on you. Do only what is necessary (Acts 15:22,28 God's Word).

It was the entire leadership that decided the issue, not merely Peter. Indeed, when a letter was written to the churches, to inform them of the decision of these church leaders, it was at the suggestion of James that this letter was composed. In fact, after the council of Jerusalem, Peter is never heard of again in the Book of Acts.

If Anyone, James Seems To Have Been The Leader Of The Early Church

It is possible that James, the Lord's brother, was in a position of leadership in the early church. It was his verdict at the council of Jerusalem that was followed by the other leaders.

Furthermore, when Peter was supernaturally freed from prison, he told the ones praying for him to tell James and the brothers what had happened. The Bible records it as follows:

Peter made a sign with his hand to tell them to be quiet. He explained how the Lord led him out of the jail, and he said, "Tell James and the other believers what happened." Then he left to go to another place (Acts 12:17 NCV).

Again, James is singled out for a position of authority. If there was one person in authority, it would seemingly have been James. However, we cannot be certain that even he had authority over the others. There may have been other reasons as to why he was singled out. We simply do not have enough information to make any firm judgment.

In this passage, we also have the next to the last mention of Peter in the Book of Acts. The text says he "went to another place." He is no longer a major player in the Book of Acts. The only other time he is mentioned in

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the Book of Acts is at the council of Jerusalem. After that time, he disappears from its pages.

From reading the Book of Acts, it becomes clear that the Apostle Paul became a central figure in the church from that time onward. The remainder of the Book of Acts is about his ministry and how he, not Peter, got to the city of Rome. Peter disappears from the scene.

We can also note that the Apostle John was a key leader in the church. He was given the honor of writing the last book of the New Testament: the Book of Revelation.

Thus, while Peter was indeed a leader of the early church, he was not the only leader.

17. The Choice Of Matthias To Replace Judas Argues Against Apostolic Succession

While some Romanists look at the choice of Matthias to replace Judas as an indication that the apostles had successors, the opposite is true. To be a member of the apostolic circle, a person had to have certain credentials. Among these credentials was seeing the risen Christ. Peter himself said:

Thus one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time the Lord Jesus associated with us, beginning from the baptism by John until the day he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness of his resurrection together with us” (Acts 1:21-22 NET).

The qualifications of an apostle included being with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry through the time He came back from the dead. Obviously, nobody, apart from those living at Jesus’ time, could meet these qualifications.

18. The Rock Upon Which Jesus Would Build The Church Was Not Necessarily Peter

The key passage used by the Roman Catholic Church for Peter’s authority is Matthew 16:13-20. The Roman Church says that the obvious meaning of the passage is that Peter was given the position of primacy over the other apostles. Yet, as we shall see, this is simply not the case.

For one thing, the main question that Jesus asked was who people said that He was! He was certainly not asking whom the people thought Peter was. The thrust of the passage is the identity of Jesus, not Peter.

In addition, in the parallel passages in Mark and Luke, the statement about Peter and the rock is not included! John’s gospel does not even mention this incident.

If these words of Jesus have the profound meaning that Rome says that they have, then it is strange that the “rock statement” is found in only one of the four gospels.

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Who Or What Was The Rock?

Furthermore, when Jesus told Peter that He would build His church on “this rock,” He was not necessarily referring to Peter. There are various ways in which Jesus’ statement can be understood. They are as follows.

Option 1: Peter Was The Rock

Many people consider that Peter himself is the rock upon which Christ will build His church. The following arguments have been put forward for this view.

First, Jesus spoke in Aramaic to Peter. This language has no separate word for big rock or small rock. Therefore, when Jesus said that He would build His church upon this rock, He was referring to Peter whom He had previously named “rock.”

The context also has to be considered. It makes more sense in the context to assume the rock refers to Peter rather than to something else or someone else. Jesus was responding to Peter’s confession to Him being the Messiah. He then told Peter that he was called a rock, and on this rock, namely Peter, Jesus would build His church. Thus, the most natural way to understand Jesus’ words is in reference to Peter. Therefore, Peter is the rock on whom the church was built.

Response

With respect to Jesus speaking in Aramaic, let us remember that Matthew is written in Greek and not in Aramaic. There is no guarantee that Jesus spoke Aramaic on this occasion. To the contrary, many scholars are becoming persuaded that Greek was the main language that Jesus used. Whatever the case may be, the section before us is written in Greek. So any determination of the meaning of the word rock has to be made from the Greek text. We should not make our own interpretation of this passage based upon some unknown, non-existent, Aramaic original. We must deal with the text as it stands.

In the Greek text, there is a play on words. Jesus gave Peter the name of *petros* or “Rocky.” This word has the idea of a small rock or stone which could be thrown at ones enemies. However, Jesus says He will build His church upon a *petra*. This word means a large boulder, or an immovable ledge of rock. These two Greek words are never used interchangeably. Peter, therefore, is not necessarily the rock upon which Jesus would build His church. Thus, it does not inevitably follow from the word-play that ‘this rock’ must be Peter. The best we can say is that it may refer to him.

As we look at the New Testament, we find similar “rock” metaphors which are applied to other apostles. For example, Paul called James, Peter, and John “pillars.” He wrote:

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In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers (Galatians 2:9 NLT).

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said that the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets but with Jesus Christ being the cornerstone:

You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20 God's Word).

In the Book of Revelation, we find another example of this—the foundation stones of the heavenly city have the name of the twelve apostles:

The wall of the city had 12 foundations. The 12 names of the 12 apostles of the lamb were written on them (Revelation 21:14 God's Word).

Therefore, the rock, or foundation metaphor is applied to all of the apostles elsewhere in the New Testament, not merely to Peter. Consequently, if Peter is meant by the rock, then he is not the exclusive foundation of the church. He is representative of the other apostles, for the twelvefold foundation of the church is found in other passages.

Furthermore, we find these same words are spoken to the rest of the Twelve in Matthew 18:18. Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven (Matthew 18:18 NET).

In this context, the “you” is plural. The authority was given to all the apostles. Thus, Peter is not the unique foundation of the church. On the contrary, it is Jesus Christ who is the foundation. Paul wrote:

And God put all things under Christ's feet and he gave him to the church as head over all things. Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22,23 NET).

The church is the body of Christ and a body can have only one head, not two. Christ is the head of the church.

Therefore, the rock or foundation of the church is more likely the confession of Peter, representing the apostles, that Jesus is the Christ. It was this message which they spread to the world. The doctrine of the Apostles became normative for the true church. Peter's role is the spokesman for the disciples. Often, he represented the disciples but never was given the position of having authority over them.

There is something else. Even if it is addressed to Peter, the words are addressed to Peter as an individual. It is not in his capacity as the bishop

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of Rome or to any successors which he might have. These words were personally addressed to Peter.

There is one other thing. If Peter were the ‘rock,’ upon which Jesus was to build the church, we would more naturally expect the Lord to speak of him in the third person to the other disciples. In other words, Jesus would tell them that he, Peter, is the rock on which He would build His church. However, the text has Jesus addressing Peter and not the other apostles.

Consequently, even if Jesus was referring to Peter as an individual, there is no reason to suppose that he was to head the church in the same way the Roman Church assumes.

Option 2: Peter’s Confession Was The Rock

While many people believe that Peter was the rock that Jesus would build His church upon, this interpretation has not always been the most popular. Indeed, from the writings which have survived from those in the early church, we find that the great majority of writers did not understand this passage to refer to Peter himself.

Instead, it was held that it was Peter’s confession, that Jesus was the Christ, which was the rock on which the church was built. In the context in the Gospel of Matthew, Peter confessed Jesus to be the promised Messiah. He was the first of Jesus’ disciples to make this confession public. The “rock” upon which the church is built is the truth that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah.

Option 3: Jesus Was The Rock

There are some who reject both of these views. They say that neither Peter, nor his confession was the rock Jesus was referring to. The rock is Jesus Himself. Indeed, the Apostle Paul would later write how Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church:

The foundation that has already been laid is Jesus Christ, and no one can lay down any other foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11 NCV).

Jesus is the rock, not Peter, nor His confession. Therefore, when Jesus said upon this rock I will build my church, He probably made some gesture pointing to Himself rather than referring to Peter.

Option 4: The Rock Of Jesus’ Teachings

There is another view that sees the rock as a reference to Jesus’ teachings. When Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount the Bible says He compared His teachings to a rock—a sure foundation. Jesus said:

Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock (Matthew 7:24 NET).

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It is, therefore, upon the sure foundations of the teachings of Jesus that the church will be built.

Whichever option one chooses for this famous statement of Jesus, it certainly does not follow that Peter was to be the first leader of the Christian church or that his authority would somehow be passed on.

There is also one other thing we must mention. How could Christ name Peter the head of the church in one moment and then the next moment say that Peter is speaking the words of Satan? Immediately after the “rock” statement we have this incident recorded:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:21-23 NIV).

Jesus’ immediate rebuke of Peter is certainly inconsistent with the idea that He had just named Peter as the future leader of the church. Indeed, Peter showed his fallibility. After he confessed Christ as the Messiah he tried to stop Jesus from fulfilling the reason He came to earth, to die on the cross. Peter believed he had the authority to rebuke Jesus. Jesus set him straight.

19. Peter Was Singled Out Because He Needed Pastoral Care

Peter is indeed singled out a number of times in the gospels. However, it is usually because he needed some type of pastoral care. In Gospel according to Luke, Jesus tells Peter that Satan has wished to sift him as wheat. He said:

Simon, Simon, pay attention! Satan has demanded to have you all, to sift you like wheat (Luke 22:31 NET).

Like John 21:15-17, where Jesus tells Peter to feed His sheep, this passage shows Peter needed pastoral care. He needed the encouragement from Jesus that he would not be abandoned as he abandoned Jesus. In fact, Peter was told that he would be restored by Jesus and then Peter, in turn, would strengthen his fellow disciples who also would abandon Jesus.

Therefore, this passage, like John 21:15-17, is restorative in nature. The fallen disciple Peter would be able to strengthen the other fallen disciples. He would be a prime example of God’s grace. There is nothing that even remotely suggests his primacy over the other disciples.

Indeed, when Jesus told Peter to strengthen his brothers he was not giving sole authority to him. The same terminology is used of Paul and Barnabas in the Book of Acts. It says:

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They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions” (Acts 14:22 NET).

Paul and Barnabas, as leaders, strengthened the other believers. Furthermore, two other disciples, Judas and Silas, have this same terminology used of them. Therefore, the fact that Jesus told Peter to strengthen the other disciples does not set him apart from the others.

Therefore, this passage in Luke is about the restoration of Peter after his sin, not about his authority or jurisdiction.

A Number Of Things Would Have To Be Proven For The Roman Catholic Doctrine To Be True

Even if it were somehow possible to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that Peter was preeminent among the apostles, as well as the spiritual leader of all believers, and the rock upon which the church was built, there would still be the issue of a successor.

For the Roman Catholic doctrine of the papacy to be true, a number of things would have to be proven to be true from the Bible. They are as follows.

1. It Would Have To Be Proven That Peter Was The Supreme Authority

First, it would have to be established that Peter was given the role of supreme authority among all Christians by Christ Himself. Jesus must have intended to make Peter the leader of all believers. Without this, the doctrine of the primacy of Peter is refuted. Yet, as we have seen, there is no evidence of this whatsoever.

2. Peter Had Some Sort Of Infallibility

Next, Peter would have to have had some sort of spiritual infallibility to speak for Christ. He would have to have been given a unique ability to speak infallibly on these issues.

Yet, we find that Paul publicly rebuked Peter for moving away from the Gentiles to eat together with Jewish believers. This is hardly consistent with some sort of spiritual infallibility. We also find that Peter never claimed such spiritual infallibility and the believers did not treat Him as though he were infallible.

3. He Was The First Bishop Of Rome: The Leader Of All Christians

It would also have to be demonstrated that Peter was the first Bishop, or overseer, at the Church in Rome. Also, Christ must have intended Peter to die in the position of Bishop of Rome, or leader of the church. While it is

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possible Peter did go to Rome after being freed from imprisonment in Jerusalem, there is nothing about this mentioned in the New Testament.

In fact, we find Peter in the city of Jerusalem four years after his release from prison. He was one of the leaders at the council of Jerusalem. If he had gone to Rome in the interim, he certainly did not return to Jerusalem as Bishop of Rome and leader of the church.

There is some evidence from the Church Fathers that Peter was in Rome later in his life. They said that he was martyred by Caesar Nero between the years A.D. 64 and A.D. 67. Yet this does not mean that he was the Bishop of the Church of Rome or that he spent a considerable amount of time in that city.

4. He Would Have An Authorized Successor

Even if all of these things could be proven, there would still be the issue of a successor for Peter. There would have to be some evidence that Peter had an authorized successor. Christ Himself would have to authorize a successor for the position that Peter held. Again, no evidence exists for a successor to any of the twelve apostles.

5. His Privileges Were To Be Passed Down

Not only would Peter have to have a successor, this successor would have to have the same privileges and authority that Peter possessed. Yet, no provision is made for this in Scripture.

6. His Successor Would Be The Bishop Of Rome

In addition, this successor would have to be the Bishop of Rome; he could not have been the leader of any other Christian congregation.

However, nowhere in the New Testament do we find that Rome was the center of authority for the early believers, or that the Bishop of Rome has some sort of preeminence over other believers. Indeed, in the early years of the church, Jerusalem was the place where the apostles ministered from. Add to this the idea of bishop, in the modern sense of the term, is not found anywhere in the New Testament.

7. Any Successor Would Have Peter's Infallibility

Finally, this successor would have to have had the same infallible ability as Peter was and is alleged to have had in spiritual matters. As is the case with these other points, there is nothing whatsoever in Scripture that testifies to this.

All Of These Would Have To Be True For Rome To Make Its Case

All of these points have to be established as fact for the Roman position to be true. Their claims have to be clearly set out in Scripture. It is not enough to say that these claims are likely true, or probably true. Yet, as we

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have seen, none of them can be proven and several of them are actually disproved from the testimony of Scripture. We can add the following.

There Is No Evidence The Apostles Had Successors

As we have already mentioned, the Scriptures themselves speak against the apostles having any successors. One of the credentials of an apostle is that they must have seen the risen Lord. We read the following necessary requirements for a replacement for Judas in the Book of Acts:

He must be one of the men who accompanied Jesus with us the entire time that the Lord Jesus was among us. This person must have been with us from the time that John was baptizing people to the day that Jesus was taken from us (Acts 1:21,22 God's Word).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about his authority as an apostle. His evidence? He had seen the risen Christ. He said:

I am a free man. I am an apostle. I have seen Jesus our Lord. You people are all an example of my work in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1 NCV).

Therefore, an apostle had to have personally seen the risen Christ. This would limit the apostolic number to those living at the time of Christ.

There Is No Irrefutable Evidence That Peter Was In Rome

There is no irrefutable evidence that Peter was ever in Rome—certainly no biblical evidence. While some later traditions suggest that Peter had been in Rome from his miraculous escape from prison, around A.D. 42, until A.D. 67, when he was executed, this does not fit the facts. We know that he was in Jerusalem attending the apostolic council (Acts 15) about A.D. 49.

Some people alleged that Peter, who was the then Bishop of Rome, went back to the Holy Land for the Jerusalem council as recorded in Acts 15. After this time he went to Antioch, and then returned to his position as leader of the church in Rome. Yet there is no New Testament evidence of this.

It is also interesting to note that Acts 2:14 and Acts 8:14 say that Peter was in Jerusalem. Acts 9:36-43 says that Peter went to Joppa, which is near Jerusalem. In chapter 10 of the Book of Acts, we find that Peter is still in Joppa. Acts 11:2 then says that Peter returned to Jerusalem. Now Joppa is about 30 miles from Jerusalem. If the Book of Acts records this much detail about Peter's visit to a nearby town, wouldn't we expect it to tell us if Peter went all the way to Rome? Particularly since it does inform us that Paul went to Rome. Since it records Peter going to Joppa, if he had gone to Rome, one would think that this would be recorded. Yet, nothing is said.

Around the year A.D. 56, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome. In his letter to the Romans, Paul greets twenty-seven people by

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name (Romans 16:1-23); however, Peter is not among them. This is odd if Peter, whom Paul knew personally, was in Rome as the head of the church. It is not very credible to assume that if Peter had been in Rome, especially as its bishop, Paul would have ignored him entirely. When Paul met Peter in Jerusalem, Acts 15, Peter is mentioned by name, but there is no mention of Peter by Paul in his letter to the Romans.

There is more. Paul wrote the following in his introduction to the letter to the Romans:

To everyone in Rome whom God loves and has called to be his holy people. Good will and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are yours! (Romans 1:7 God's Word).

Paul's letter was addressed to all the beloved of God in Rome. Yet, there is no mention of Peter.

In addition, if Peter had been in Rome as the bishop, why did Paul write the following to the church at Rome?

For I want very much to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you (Romans 1:11 CSB).

Why could Paul offer these people something that Peter, the Bishop of Rome, and head of the church, could not? Couldn't Peter have done this work? This verse alone seemingly makes it clear that Peter was not in Rome at that time as the leader of the church. Otherwise, they would not have needed Paul's ministry.

There is still more. Paul made it clear to the Romans that he did not intend to build on the foundation of someone else. He wrote:

And in this way I desire to preach where Christ has not been named, so as not to build on another person's foundation (Romans 15:20 NET).

This being the case, it does not seem likely that Paul would write such a letter to the Romans, a major theological treatise, if Peter had already been the Bishop of Rome for about fourteen years.

Paul also said that he established the church in Rome according to the gospel which was given to him:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages (Romans 16:25 NET).

This was the gospel message which was given to Paul and by Paul; Peter is not mentioned.

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Finally, when the Book of Acts records Paul's arrival in Rome, Peter is never mentioned. This is incredible if he was in Rome as the head of the entire church.

The absence of evidence speaks loud and clear: Peter was not in Rome during the time Paul was there.

Is Babylon Rome?

The reference made by Peter, as writing from Babylon, (1 Peter 5:13), may indeed indicate that he was writing from the city of Rome. In fact, most scholars understand Babylon to be figurative of Rome in this context.

Roman Catholics, however, are inconsistent at this point. While they claim that Babylon symbolically refers to Rome in First Peter, they usually reject that Babylon is used figuratively of Rome in the Book of Revelation. However, Revelation is a book of symbols while First Peter is not.

We can document their inconsistency as follows. The Douay/Rheims Version, a Roman Catholic translation first published in 1582, has the following footnote at 1 Peter 5:13 in their 1941 edition: "Babylon figuratively Rome."

Yet, when we find the same word Babylon in Revelation 14:8, the footnote reads in this manner:

By Babylon may be very probably signified all the wicked in general, which God will punish and destroy after the short time of this mortal life: or it may signify every great city wherein enormous sins and abominations are daily committed; and that when the measure of its iniquities is full, the punishments due to its crimes are poured on it. It may also be some city of the description in the text that will exist and be destroyed, as here described, towards the end of the world."

We can cite another example of their inconsistency. The Confraternity New Testament, published in 1941, has the following note: at 1 Peter 5:13: "Babylon: Rome. A metaphor probably founded on Jewish usage."

Yet, at Revelation 17:5, we read the following understanding of Babylon. "A mystery: the name [Babylon] is not literal but symbolical and its meaning will be revealed in due time."

Thus, while Babylon symbolically refers to Rome in First Peter, the Roman Church does not believe it refers to literal Rome in the Book of Revelation. This is all the more important when we realize that the Babylon in the Book of Revelation is the center of all false religion and immorality.

Peter May Have Been In Literal Babylon

It is also possible, but not very likely, that Peter was in literal Babylon when he composed his letter. There were still some Jews living in Babylon at the

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time Peter wrote. However, there is no tradition that says Peter was ever in Babylon while there is tradition that says Peter was in Rome.

While there is no way that we can be certain of the location of Peter when he penned First Peter, Rome is probably the likely place. Protestants have no problem accepting the idea that Peter may have gone to Rome late in his life and was martyred there.

Even if Peter wrote from the city of Rome, it does not mean that he was settled there. Actually, there is the inference that Peter's ministry was more of an itinerant apostle rather than being stationed in one place. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

Don't we have the right to be accompanied by a Christian wife, like the other apostles, the Lord's brothers, and Cephas? (1 Corinthians 9:5 CSB).

The idea of taking along a wife, or being accompanied by a wife, may suggest a ministry, like Paul's, which was itinerant.

There is more. Paul's trip to Rome is recorded in much detail in the Book of Acts (Acts 27–28). Yet, there is no mention of Peter. Indeed, when Paul was in prison in Rome in the 60's of the first century he wrote four letters known as the "prison epistles." In three of them, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, Paul sent greetings from fellow believers who were in Rome.

While sometimes Paul named these believers, Peter was never mentioned. This would be odd if Peter was in Rome as its Bishop and head of the church. All of this indicates that the idea of Peter being in Rome for a number of years, as head of the church, has no biblical support whatever. What we can say for certain is that the Book of Acts, which traces the early history of the Christian church and the advance of the gospel to Rome, shows no connection between Peter and Rome.

Furthermore, when Paul was in Rome, he wrote the following to Timothy:

At my first defense no one appeared in my support; instead they all deserted me—may they not be held accountable for it (2 Timothy 4:16 NET).

Obviously, Peter was not in Rome with Paul or else he had been there and had abandoned him! Whatever the case may be, we know that Peter was not in Rome when Paul wrote the prison epistles. Neither was he in Rome when Paul had his trial before Caesar. If he was the bishop of Rome, then why do we find his continued absence? If he was absent for long periods of time, why didn't he write a letter to the Romans as Paul did? If he did write such a letter, then why didn't the church preserve it? It would have been the primary document for the church, apart from the four gospels. Yet no such document exists.

The fact that the Scriptures are silent as to Peter being in Rome has profound implications. If God intended this man, the apostle to the Jews,

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to be the founder and bishop of the Church of Rome, which was predominately Gentile, one would think that the New Testament would give us at least some indication of this.

This is especially true if there was to be such an office as the papacy whose succession would be dependent upon one man and associated with his being a resident of Rome. We would expect that his presence in Rome would have been established so clearly in the New Testament that there could be no question about it.

Yet just the opposite is true. There is no conclusive evidence from the New Testament that Peter was ever in Rome and certainly there is no evidence that he was the leader of the church there. Why the silence if he and his successors were to be the voice of Christ upon the earth?

Even If Peter Was In Rome This Does Not Prove The Claims

Even if it can be established that Peter had been in Rome, as it is alleged, it still would not prove any of the claims the Roman Church makes. As we have already seen, many other things would also have to be true. While it is certainly possible that Peter visited Rome, or resided in it late in his life, this is not the same as assuming that he was head of the entire church which was headquartered in Rome. Of this, there is no evidence whatsoever. And even if he was the leader of the Roman Church for a few years, it still does not prove that Christ had intended to give him, as the Bishop of Rome, authority over all of the other churches.

Therefore, when we consider all the facts, we have no evidence that Roman Catholic doctrine of the papacy has any basis in Scripture.

Roman Catholic Sources Admit There Is No New Testament Evidence For Peter's Primacy Or Jurisdiction

Something else should be emphasized. Roman Catholic sources themselves admit there is no New Testament evidence for Peter's primacy and jurisdiction over the other disciples. Even they have to admit that the New Testament does not give Peter the authority which they confer upon him. There is no evidence that Peter had any primacy or jurisdiction over other apostles. The argument for Peter's authority has to come from after the New Testament era; a time when no one had the authority to speak authoritatively for Christ!

The One Who Would Represent Christ When He Left The World Was The Holy Spirit

Jesus promised that when He returned to heaven there would be One left behind to teach and guide the church—the Holy Spirit. He said the following on the night He was betrayed:

But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative - and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything

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and will remind you of everything I myself have told you (John 14:26 NLT).

Jesus also made another promise about the Holy Spirit that John records. He said:

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come (John 16:13 CSB).

This removes any idea that Peter was going to be the teaching authority of the church. God Himself, through the Person of the Holy Spirit, would be the Teacher of believers. It would not be through any fallible human being.

Therefore, to substitute any human being for the role of God the Holy Spirit is not only without any biblical support, it is actually blasphemous. How dare anyone remove God's teaching authority through the Holy Spirit and replace it with the teaching of fallible human beings. Indeed, those who have held the office of Pope have demonstrated time after time their fallible nature by making decisions contrary to the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Peter Was Not The Last Apostle To Die

There is one last thing. Peter died before all of the other apostles. That means that his successor, Linus, according to the Roman Catholic Church, would have exercised authority over all the remaining living apostles, including John. We find this man mentioned only once in the New Testament:

Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, as do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers (2 Timothy 4:21 CSB).

He is included in a list of people; he is not singled out as one who had any authority. Are we to believe that this man, who is only incidentally mentioned once in Scripture, would wield authority over someone like John, one of the original twelve, a man who wrote five books of the New Testament? This makes no sense whatsoever.

Conclusion: The Roman Catholic Doctrine Of The Papacy Is Not Found In The New Testament

After looking at the totality of the evidence, we conclude that there is no scriptural support whatsoever that Jesus Christ intended that Peter was the infallible Bishop of Rome, the spiritual leader of all Christians, and that upon his death he would have successors who would continue in his authority.

Jesus never gave Peter that type of authority, Peter never recognized himself as the Pope, none of the apostles ever recognized him as the Pope, and there is not even one mention of the office of the papacy in all of

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Scripture. It is also an historical fact that the Papacy was not established until several centuries after the time of Christ.

Therefore, there is absolutely nothing in Scripture that establishes the idea that one human being will be leader over the entire Christian church. Nothing.

Bible-believing Protestants are adamant that past popes have contradicted the Bible. If this is the case, then these so-called infallible men were not infallible; either the Bible or the Pope is in error. However, both cannot be infallible at the same time.

It is the Bible, the written Word of God, which is our final authority. It points beyond itself to the absolute authority of the living God. God exercises His authority in the churches through the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is complete, or sufficient, in that it contains everything the church needs to know in this world concerning the way of salvation and the proper way of serving Him. The office of the papacy is not necessary.

Summary To Question 5 Did Jesus Give Peter The Unique Authority To Speak For Him? (Papal Authority)

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be God's exclusive voice upon the earth—it alone speaks for Jesus Christ. Among its claims, is that Jesus intended to confer unique authority upon one particular individual who would represent Him. This individual would occupy the office of Bishop of Rome. The first person in that position was Peter. It is also claimed that the entire church listened and obeyed what Peter said in his role as the head of the church.

This authority, which was first given to Peter, was supposedly passed on to successive individuals. Today, the present Pope, or the Bishop of Rome, is in the unbroken line of the successors of the office that was originally given to Peter.

This issue is of the utmost importance. If the Roman Catholic view is correct, then all believers in Christ must submit to the authority of the Bishop of Rome. Disobeying him would be the same as disobeying the Lord. Since no believer wants to disobey God, it is important that we understand whether or not we are to submit to the directives of the Roman Church and the papacy.

On the other hand, if the institution of the papacy is not found in Scripture, then the believer has no obligation to obey the commands of the Roman Church, or the present pope. As can be readily seen, these issues are primary. The truth or falsity of the Roman claim about the authority of the Bishop of Rome stands or falls upon the teaching of Scripture. Consequently, it is important that we discover exactly what the Scripture does say, and does not say, on this important issue.

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For the Roman Catholic idea of the papacy to be true, a number of things would have to be proven. First, it would have to be established that Jesus intended to create such an office. Second, His intention would be that this office was to be held by the Bishop of the church at Rome. Third, Peter would have to have held this office by the specific intention of Christ. Fourth, this office was to be passed down in an unbroken line of successors until the return of Christ. Fifth, these successors would have the same infallible authority as Christ gave to Peter.

However, as the New Testament is carefully examined, there is no warrant for any of these things. Neither Christ, His apostles, or Peter himself, assumed that he had such authority over the other apostles and the rest of the Christian church. The human leadership of the early church, if there was such a thing, was seemingly held by James, the Lord's brother, not by Peter. Neither is there anything to the idea that the apostles had successors. Indeed, they had a unique ministry that, by definition, could not be passed down. Furthermore, there is no indication that the church as Rome was to be the center of God's authority on the earth.

Therefore, the evidence is clear that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Papacy is without any biblical support. This being the case, no one should be expected to believe what it teaches or submit to the authority of the Church of Rome, or to its leader, the Pope. Neither he, nor the Roman Church, has any God-given authority over Christians.

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Question 6

Do We Need An Infallible Interpreter To Properly Understand The Bible?

We all realize that human beings are fallible creatures. None of us is perfect. Indeed, our knowledge is severely limited. If this is the case, then how can we be certain that our understanding of the Bible is correct? Don't we need someone to infallibly interpret the Bible for us so that we will not go astray in our beliefs? Will not an infallible interpreter keep us from falling into error?

Many people think that an infallible interpreter of Scripture is exactly what all believer's need.

This is not merely an academic issue. Indeed, it is of vital importance. The decisions we make about God have eternal consequences. We do not want to make the wrong choices.

The Claim That An Infallible Interpreter Is Needed

It is often claimed that human beings need an infallible interpreter to correctly understand Scripture. The argument usually goes something like this. Because we human beings are fallible, none of us are able to trust our own private judgment when it comes to determining God's truth.

Therefore, how can any of us be certain that our beliefs about God are correct? How do we really know that our understanding of the Bible is the right one? Since there are so many different denominations which hold so many different beliefs, is it possible we are going to the wrong church or that we are members of the wrong denomination?

Questions like these assume the need for some type of infallible interpreter to tell us exactly what we should believe. Seemingly, the only way in which believers could know they are following God's truth, as well as being united in the faith, is by obeying the teachings of an infallible interpreter of Scripture.

This basically sums up the claim of a number of different groups. They assume that we humans need an infallible interpreter to properly understand God's Word. Is this claim true? Are we incapable of understanding God's truth apart from some infallible interpreter?

Some Problems With The Infallible Interpreter Claim

There are a number of problems with the idea that we must have some type of infallible interpreter to be able to properly understand the Scripture. They include the following.

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1. We Cannot Be Certain We Need An Infallible Interpreter

Our first problem concerns the need for an infallible interpreter. If our human judgments are always fallible, then how can we infallibly decide that we need such an interpreter? Why must there be someone who will infallibly interpret the Scripture for us? Why should we assume that we cannot understand the Bible on its own?

If we really cannot trust our fallible judgment, then we can never be certain that we actually need an infallible interpreter.

2. How Can We Know We Have Chosen The Right Infallible Interpreter?

If we come to the conclusion that we do need an infallible interpreter to properly understand the Bible, this still does not solve our dilemma. We also need to know which infallible interpreter to use.

Unfortunately, there are many organizations which claim that they are the only infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture. This includes such groups as the Roman Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society—the Jehovah Witnesses. There are also countless others which we could add to this list.

To make matters worse, each of these groups is in direct conflict with the other groups with respect to their main teachings! Therefore, the wrong interpreter will lead to the wrong doctrine.

This puts us in a dilemma for which there is no solution. Since we are fallible, we can never be certain that we have chosen the correct infallible interpreter of Scripture. Our fallible judgment may lead us to choose the wrong one.

Whether we choose Rome, the Mormon Church, the Watchtower, or any one of the thousands of other groups, we could never be confident that our choice is correct. We may be led astray by the wrong infallible interpreter. Furthermore, because we are fallible, we would never know we were being led astray!

This is a real problem. Indeed, Jesus warned about false prophets who will lead people astray. He said:

False Christs and false prophets will come and perform great wonders and miracles. They will try to fool even the people God has chosen, if that is possible (Matthew 24:24 NCV).

Consequently, even if we believed that an infallible interpreter is absolutely necessary for us to correctly understand Scripture, we, as fallible human beings, could never be assured that we have chosen the right and true infallible interpreter!

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We could never be confident that our fallible judgment and logic lead us to make the right decision. Unfortunately, there is no solution to this dilemma if we assume that we need some type of infallible interpreter.

3. There Is No Unity Among Those Groups Who Have Infallible Interpreters

This next point demonstrates how the idea of an infallible interpreter does not work in the real world. Seemingly, those particular groups which do have an infallible interpreter to tell them what to believe should have a visible unity. They should be completely united in their belief system.

However, this is not the case. As one closely examines the various organizations which proclaim they have an infallible interpreter, we do not find the unity that is expected. Indeed, there is as much disunity, if not more, among these groups as there is among those who look to the Bible alone as the infallible standard of divine truth. These groups argue among themselves about every conceivable issue! There is no visible unity which is present.

Therefore, those people who advocate the need for some type of infallible interpreter cannot point to visible unity among their own particular group.

4. The New Testament Illustrates How An Infallible Standard Will Not Bring About Complete Unity

The fact that an infallible interpreter will not bring about visible unity is illustrated in the New Testament. Indeed, we find that there were divisions among the earliest believers in Jesus. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

My dear friends, as a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you to get along with each other. Don't take sides. Always try to agree in what you think. Several people from Chloe's family have already reported to me that you keep arguing with each other. They have said that some of you claim to follow me, while others claim to follow Apollos or Peter or Christ. Has Christ been divided up? Was I nailed to a cross for you? Were you baptized in my name? I thank God that I didn't baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius. Not one of you can say that you were baptized in my name. I did baptize the family of Stephanas, but I don't remember if I baptized anyone else. Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the good news without using big words that would make the cross of Christ lose its power (1 Corinthians 1:10-17 CEV).

There was certainly no visible unity at the church in Corinth. To the contrary, the church was divided into certain groups or factions which claimed to have Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ as their leader. Yet these people had been taught by the handpicked disciples of Jesus Himself. They had the opportunity to learn from those who were taught directly by Jesus. However, there was still disunity among them.

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This, therefore, answers the objection by those who say we need an infallible interpreter of the Bible in order to produce unity among the believers. Unity is not produced by having a perfect standard. They had a perfect standard: the teachings of Jesus infallibly delivered through His apostles.

Yet, they were in disunity. If the first Christians, who had direct contact with Jesus apostles, could not show complete visible unity to the world, then why should we expect visible unity among all Christians some two thousand years removed from the time of Christ?

There is something else we should notice. The Apostle Paul did not attempt to solve these divisions in Corinth by appealing to some infallible interpreter who would once and for all settle the divisions. Instead he emphasized the unity which we have in Jesus Christ; a unity which is based upon the gospel message. This is what unites all believers.

Therefore, it is not necessary for each Christian to have an infallible interpreter of Scripture to know what he or she should believe. Indeed, the idea of an infallible interpreter is neither biblical nor is it workable.

The Biblical Response:

We now consider what the Bible has to say on this issue of personal responsibility or private judgment. The following points needs to be made.

1. The Bible Commands Us To Use Our Private Judgment To Decide Spiritual Matters

To begin with, after Jesus ascended into heaven, believers were never commanded to follow the teachings of some infallible interpreter. To the contrary, the New Testament says that Christians are to exercise their own private judgment in spiritual matters. We are to use our minds to weigh and evaluate the truth.

The Bible assumes that we have the capability of properly doing this. Furthermore, Scripture also assumes we have the responsibility of doing this. We find this idea of personal responsibility taught in both testaments.

2. The Old Testament Assumes Humans Must Make Their Own Decisions

In the Old Testament, we find Joshua, the leader of Israel, giving his people this challenge:

Then Joshua said to the people, “Now respect the LORD and serve him fully and sincerely. Throw away the gods that your ancestors worshiped on the other side of the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD. But if you don’t want to serve the LORD, you must choose for yourselves today whom you will serve. You may serve the gods that your ancestors worshiped when they lived on the other side of the Euphrates River, or you may serve the gods of the Amorites

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who lived in this land. As for me and my family, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15 NCV).

They were to choose whom they were to serve. Will it be the Lord or the false gods? They were not told that someone had to make the choice for them. They were to use their own judgment and they would be held responsible for the judgment which they made.

On another occasion, Elijah the prophet told the people that they had to make a decision as to whom to follow: the Lord or Baal. The Bible says:

Elijah stood up in front of all the people and asked them, “How long will you try to have it both ways? If the LORD is God, follow him; if Baal is God, follow him.” The people didn’t say a word (1 Kings 18:21 God’s Word).

Again, the people were given a choice of whom to serve. They had to make the decision.

3. Jesus Assumed We Were To Search The Scriptures On Our Own

In the New Testament, we find that Jesus recognized that the religious leaders in His day “searched the Scripture.” John records Him saying:

You search the Scriptures, because you think you will find eternal life in them. The Scriptures tell about me (John 5:39 CEV).

Jesus did not discourage this practice. In fact, He told them that a searching of the Scripture would cause the people to believe in Him. He said:

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (John 5:46 NIV).

Searching the Scripture would cause people to believe in Jesus.

In another place, Jesus emphasized that people are to love the Lord with their mind. Matthew records Him saying:

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind (Matthew 22:37 NLT).

This assumes that people are able to weigh and evaluate spiritual truth. We are to think about things and then reach definite conclusions.

Finally, the people in Jesus’ day were held responsible to act upon what the Scripture said. Indeed, Jesus pronounced judgment upon the nation for not accepting Him as the promised Messiah. We read the following in Luke’s gospel:

When he came closer and saw the city, he began to cry. He said, “If you had only known today what would bring you peace! But now it is

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hidden, so you cannot see it. The time will come when enemy armies will build a wall to surround you and close you in on every side. They will level you to the ground and kill your people. One stone will not be left on top of another, because you didn't recognize the time when God came to help you (Luke 19:41-44 God's Word).

Judgment came upon the nation of Israel for their rejection of Jesus. Why did they reject Him? It is because they did not believe what the Scripture said.

On the day of His resurrection Jesus again emphasized the necessity of knowing the Scripture:

Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are! You're so slow to believe everything the prophets said! Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then he began with Moses' Teachings and the Prophets to explain to them what was said about him throughout the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27 God's Word).

If they had paid attention to what Moses and the Prophets had written, they would have understood that the Messiah had to die. Again, *they* were held personally responsible for knowing the truth of Scripture.

4. Jesus' Apostles Urged Believers To Evaluate The Truth

Not only did Jesus hold the people personally responsible for obeying the Scripture, we also find that the apostles of Jesus urged the believers to do their own evaluation of spiritual truth. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

But test everything. Keep what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NCV).

We have to test things by using our private judgment; not blindly following some infallible interpreter.

The Apostle John wrote about the need of testing the spirits. He said:

My dear friends, many false prophets have gone out into the world. So do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God (1 John 4:1 NCV).

There is nothing in his command that suggests we are to merely follow the teaching of some infallible interpreter. We are to test the spirits; we are to make the judgment.

In another place, Paul commanded Timothy to teach the truth of Scripture in a correct manner. He said:

Do your best to present yourself to God as a tried-and-true worker who isn't ashamed to teach the word of truth correctly (2 Timothy 2:15 God's Word).

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How would he accomplish this? How would he become a student of the Scripture? He would have to work at it by personally studying the Scripture; not by relying on some infallible interpreter.

Finally, in a passage which speaks directly to this issue, Paul wrote the following to the Galatians:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Galatians 1:8,9 NIV).

In this passage, Paul assumes that his readers were able to evaluate the different messages they were hearing. In fact, they were held responsible to make the right choice as to what the true gospel consisted of. They were to use their own private judgment to determine what the genuine gospel of Jesus Christ was, and what the genuine gospel was not.

There is no appeal made to some type of authoritative source to discover what it says on the matter. Each believer is responsible to make his or her own decision.

5. The Holy Spirit Is The Infallible Guide For Believers

The reason that we do not need any infallible human interpreter of Scripture is because it is the Holy Spirit of God who guides and teaches believers. Paul wrote:

That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God’s deep secrets. No one can know what anyone else is really thinking except that person alone, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world’s spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren’t Christians can’t understand these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means. We who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can’t understand us at all (1 Corinthians 2:9-15 NLT).

The proper understanding of God’s Word comes from the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. He indwells all those who believe in Jesus and He is the One who teaches us and guides us into all truth.

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6. **The Human Heart Will Not Permit Complete Unity On All Spiritual Matters**

There is one last thing we should mention. If we do not need an infallible interpreter, and the Holy Spirit is teaching all believers, then why don't we find complete unity concerning all spiritual matters among Bible believers?

Why do Bible believers, who have the Holy Spirit of God dwelling inside of them, have so many differences of opinion among themselves? Why doesn't the Holy Spirit bring about this desired unity among all believers?

The answer to this question is found in the pages of Scripture. The Bible says that the problem that plagues all of humanity is a sinful heart. The prophet Jeremiah put it this way:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV)

Our sinful natures will not allow us to have complete unity on every spiritual issue. Each and every believer, though a new creation in Jesus Christ, is still shackled with a sin nature.

Add to this, each of us comes from a different background with different experiences, and different amounts of training. These factors have contributed to the biases as well as the limitations which we now have. When we couple our biases with our sinful human nature it is not surprising that we do not have unanimous agreement on every spiritual matter. The problem, therefore, is not with the perfect standard, the Bible, or with the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. The problem is with us.

Thus, visible unity on all spiritual matters is not brought about by having an infallible standard of truth or an infallible teacher; the sinfulness of our human heart will not allow us to have this visible unity on all matters.

Therefore, we should not be surprised when Bible-believers have different views on such subjects as baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the eternal security of the believer. This does not mean that there are no biblical answers to these issues, it merely means that some people, for whatever reason, presently do not have the correct answer.

However, while not all Bible-believers agree on every single issue, there certainly is agreement on the main teachings of the faith. Christians are united on their view of the nature of the Bible, the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the division of humanity into two groups: saved and lost. It is not the essentials where the disagreements are found.

Therefore, pointing out differences among Bible-believers does not strengthen the case for the need of some type of infallible interpreter.

Consequently, it is clear from the teachings of Scripture that we believers do not need any type of infallible interpreter to properly understand the truth of God. Each of us, through the teaching work of the Holy Spirit,

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has the capability as well as the responsibility to comprehend His Holy Word. While our understanding will never be perfect, there are many things which we will clearly understand.

Summary To Question 6 Do We Need An Infallible Interpreter To Properly Understand The Bible?

There are a number of organizations who claim that we human beings are unable to correctly understand the Bible on our own. Consequently, we need some type of infallible authority to properly interpret God's Word. Otherwise, we might be led into spiritual darkness. Furthermore, each of these organizations claims that they are this infallible authority.

There are a number of problems with this viewpoint. Even if we accept the idea that we need an infallible interpreter to properly understand God's truth, it still does not solve the problem of possibly being led astray. To begin with, we could never infallibly know that we need an infallible interpreter! By definition, any decision as to whether or not we need such an infallible source would be fallibly made. We could never be certain we actually need such an interpreter.

Furthermore, even if an infallible interpreter is necessary, as fallible humans we could never be certain that we have made the correct choice of the right infallible interpreter.

As we mentioned, there are many groups who claim that they are the infallible interpreter of the Bible. Which one of them do we listen to? How can we infallibly decide? To make matters worse, each of these groups, which claim that an infallible interpreter is needed, contradicts all of the other groups in their main teachings! This leaves us in a hopeless dilemma.

There is still an additional problem. Even if we did find the right infallible interpreter among all of the potential candidates, we still have to interpret what was said. It is possible that we will misunderstand what the infallible interpreter is telling us.

Finally, the idea that an infallible interpreter will bring about visible unity among God's people is simply not true. Not only is there disunity among organizations which claim they are the sole infallible interpreter of Scripture, we also find disunity among members of the early church. While they had a perfect standard, the teachings of Jesus' handpicked apostles, they still were divided over a number of issues. Why should we think that we will do any better?

Fortunately, we do not have to search for some type of infallible interpreter. The Bible assumes that we can and should make our own private judgments about spiritual matters. In fact, we are responsible for making such choices. Nowhere in the Bible do we find the slightest hint that we need some type of infallible interpreter to properly understand Scripture. To the contrary, God has given each believer the necessary

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equipment, through the Holy Spirit, to properly understand the truths of God.

Even with the infallible standard of Scripture and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, we will still not have complete unity among Bible-believers. The reason lies not with the problem of an infallible standard or something lacking in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it lies with the sinful human heart. The sinfulness of our hearts will not allow us to come to complete unity on all spiritual matters.

While Bible-believing Christians will always be in disagreement on a number of issues pertaining to Scripture, there is agreement on the main issue: the gospel of Jesus Christ. As far as the other issues are concerned, it is our responsibility to continue to personally study the Scriptures to discover what the Bible actually does say about these issues. Therefore, no such infallible interpreter exists or is even necessary.

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Question 7

What Is The Jewish View Of The Authority Of Scripture?

Do Jews view the Old Testament in the same way as Christians? Is it the final standard for all matters of faith and practice? What is the traditional Jewish view of the Bible by those who believe the Hebrew Scriptures are God's divinely inspired Word for humanity?

It is important to understand the differences between the traditional Jewish view of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian view. The following observations need to be made about this issue.

1. The Hebrew Scriptures Alone Are God's Revealed Word

The traditional Jewish belief is that the Hebrew Scripture, or the Old Testament, is the Word of God. It alone is the sacred Scripture that has been revealed to humanity. They reject the idea that the Hebrew Scripture is the "Old" Testament because they do not accept the New Testament. They also reject the writings known as the "Old Testament Apocrypha." They understand the Hebrew Scriptures as the only sacred writings possessing divine authority.

Before the New Testament was written, we find the first Christians holding the same perspective toward the Hebrew Scriptures as the Jews. They believed this limited group of writings, and only these writings, were the sacred Scripture which God had given to the human race. No other written works carried God's divine authority.

2. The Early Christians Went To Jewish Places Of Worship To Preach Jesus

We also discover that the early Christians went to the Jewish places of worship: to the temple and the synagogues. They did this to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. We read the following in the Book of Acts:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time for prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon (Acts 3:1 NET).

Later, we again find Peter and John teaching at the temple in Jerusalem. This episode is also recorded in the Book of Acts:

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, priests, the captain of the soldiers that guarded the Temple, and Sadducees came up to them (Acts 4:1 NCV).

The early Christians went to the temple every day to preach and teach Jesus to the Jewish people. The Bible says:

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42 NKJV).

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Since the Jews and Christians both believed in the divine authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christians used these Scriptures to show the Jews that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

We also find that Stephen, the first martyr, was confronted in a synagogue while he was preaching Jesus. We read the following in the Book of Acts:

But some men from Cyrene and Alexandria were members of a group who called themselves “Free Men.” They started arguing with Stephen. Some others from Cilicia and Asia also argued with him. But they were no match for Stephen, who spoke with the great wisdom that the Spirit gave him (Acts 6:9,10 CEV).

The Apostle Paul went to the synagogue to preach the message that Jesus was the promised Messiah. The Bible records it this way:

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue said to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Acts 13:14,15 NKJV).

We are told that it was Paul’s custom to go to the synagogues and preach. Scripture tells us that he went to Thessalonica for three consecutive Sabbaths:

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. (Acts 17:1-3 NIV).

Paul could reason with the Jews from the Hebrew Scriptures because both Jews and Christians recognized the divine authority of these sacred writings.

Thus, we find that the early Christians went to the same places of worship as the Jews, and they used the same Scripture as the Jews. However, each group held a different perspective upon the fulfillment of the Hebrew Scripture. The Christians went to these places to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah—the One whom the Law and the Prophets looked forward.

Eventually the story of the life and ministry of Jesus, along with His teachings which were carried on by His followers, were put into writing into a “New Testament.” The Jews do not accept the New Testament as divinely inspired Scripture. Thus, while the Jews have only one group of sacred writings, the Old Testament or the Hebrew Scripture, the Christians have two groups: the Old and the New Testament.

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3. The Jews Are Still Awaiting The Coming Of The Messiah

Both Jews and Christians saw the Old Testament as predicting the coming of the Messiah, or Deliverer. Since the Jews have rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and the New Testament as divinely inspired Scripture, they are still waiting for the coming Messiah. They believe the prophecies about the Messiah are still to be fulfilled.

4. The Jews Have A Long History Of Oral Tradition

While the Jews have only accepted the Hebrew Scripture as God's divinely inspired Word, they do not limit God's truth to these writings alone. Along with the written Scripture, the Jews have a long history of non-written, or "oral tradition. This unwritten tradition deals with all aspects of Jewish belief and practice. From the books of Moses, the Jews have derived rules for daily life. This is known as the *halakah* which literally means "way of life." This has become the main source for their beliefs.

5. The Oral Traditions Were Eventually Put Into Writing

The unwritten traditions were later put into writing. They are known as the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the Tosefta. The Talmud, which in its written form comes from the third century A.D., is the comprehensive term for the Mishnah. It is divided into sixty-three parts, or tractates, and consists of customs, proverbs, and folklore. To many Jewish people, these written traditions are given the same authority as the written Word of God—the Hebrew Scriptures.

6. Traditions Have Equal Value To Scripture

This brings us to another difference between Judaism and Protestant Christianity. The traditions and teachings of the Jewish sages now have equal value with the Scripture. The Jews believe that the entire revelation of God to humanity is not limited to one book.

Unwritten tradition has always been a means to interpret and apply Scripture. Thus, the oral law was assumed to have the same authority as the written law.

We find this belief among those who opposed Jesus. We read about this when Jesus confronted the Pharisees. Matthew records the following episode:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem. They asked him, "Why don't your followers obey the unwritten laws which have been handed down to us? They don't wash their hands before they eat." Jesus answered, "And why do you refuse to obey God's command so that you can follow your own teachings?" (Matthew 15:1-3 NCV).

Jesus said that the religious leaders broke the commandments of God on a regular basis. He was referring to the following Old Testament passages:

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Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12 CSB).

In the Book of Deuteronomy, it says:

Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God will give you (Deuteronomy 5:16 NLT).

Jesus made it clear that all traditions needed to conform to the teaching of the written Word of God. Otherwise, they should not be believed.

7. Result: Good Works Have Now Replaced Sacrifices For Sin

There is something else—a different means by which to approach God. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in year A.D. 70. Therefore, the Jews could no longer offer sacrifices to the Lord as prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures. This caused them to rethink how they could fulfill their duty toward God. Over time they decided that the performance of good deeds was the way in which they could offer sacrifices to the Lord. Therefore, good works, instead of sacrifices, became the basis of their faith.

Conclusion: The Scripture Does Not Have The Final Authority In Judaism

The consequence of placing tradition on an equal level with Scripture is that the Scripture is not the final authority where matters of belief and practice are settled. To the contrary, the Scripture is looked at as the foundation of truth, but the written traditions have become as authoritative as, or more authoritative than, written Scripture. This is a major distinction between the Jewish view of where authority rests and the Protestant position.

Summary To Question 7

What Is The Jewish View Of The Authority Of Scripture?

Judaism believes the Hebrew Scriptures are God's only written revelation to humanity. The early Christians held the same view until the New Testament was written.

Unlike Protestant Christians, the Jews do not attach authority solely to the Old Testament. In a sense they are like the Roman Catholic Church where there is some other authority outside of Scripture. They believe that from the beginning, God has given oral tradition alongside written Scripture. These oral traditions were eventually put into writing. The writings are known as the Midrash, Talmud, and Tosefta.

In addition, there is now a different way by which God is approached. Instead of sacrifices, God is now pleased through good works alone. These are some of the differences between Judaism and Christianity with respect to the area of authority.

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Question 8

What Are Some Of The Things That Christians Mistakenly Emphasize In Place Of Scripture?

There are people who do not accept the Bible as the final rule of all matters of faith and practice. For them, there is no ultimate source of authority in the Scriptures. For others, the Bible is their textbook. It is the sole source of specific information about who God is, and what He wants from us.

However, some of these people who do accept the Bible often make their own mistakes when it comes to the matter of final authority. In practice, they have a source of authority that is actually above the Scripture. The problems come in the following areas.

1. Church Creeds

Church creeds are summarized statements of belief—they state what Christians believe about the teachings of the faith. Unfortunately, many Christians pay more attention to church creeds than to what the Bible actually says.

While creeds can be helpful, they should never be given more authority than the Bible. Creeds are not infallible; they can always be revised. Furthermore, they are too short and too general to provide any real value. Moreover, creeds are a secondary source; they appeal to Scripture as the final authority. Therefore, they should never be looked upon as some final statement about what Christians believe.

There are further problems with creeds. For example, the Apostles' Creed, probably the most familiar of all, is so general that many groups, including heretics, have been able to happily recite it. Arians, those who reject the biblical truth that Jesus Christ is God, are able to recite this creed because it says nothing specific about Jesus' nature.

Protestants and Roman Catholics alike see this creed as giving evidence for their particular viewpoints. These illustrations point out the ultimate meaninglessness of this creed. It is too general and too vague to have any real significance.

2. Confessional Statements

Confessional statements are more detailed explanations of Christian belief than are the creeds. The most important of the confessional statements for Protestants include the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and the Augsburg Confession. These are among the most important statements that certain groups within Protestantism have produced to set forth their beliefs.

While confessional statements contain more content than the creeds, they are still human-made documents. They should never be considered as a substitute for Scripture.

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In addition, these confessional statements reflect the views of a particular group within the Protestant Church. Not everyone who calls themselves a Protestant would necessarily agree with everything the statement said. In addition, confessional statements, like the creeds, appeal to Scripture as the final authority. Consequently, they are secondary statements.

3. Tradition

While giving lip-service to the Bible as the final authority, some groups, for all intents and purposes, have put some sort of tradition in their church as their authority. The Bible does tell believers to submit to church authority:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7 NIV).

The writer to the Hebrews also says:

Obey your leaders and act under their authority. They are watching over you, because they are responsible for your souls. Obey them so that they will do this work with joy, not sadness. It will not help you to make their work hard (Hebrews 13:17 NCV).

Although the church should set guidelines, these guidelines are not infallible. Again, what a particular tradition does or does not do, should not be the final source of our authority.

4. Current Beliefs Among Christians: The Mind Of The Church

Some people look to the current views of believers on a particular matter, or the mind of the church, to be some sort of final authority on any particular matter. The question then would be asked, "What does the consensus of Christians believe?" This would determine where final authority comes from.

While we should not reject out of hand what the current opinion of believers may be, there is the enormous problem of determining which Christians we are going to look to as that authority. Will it be scholars? Pastors? A group of pastors? Some church council? If so, then which scholar, pastor, group of pastors, or church council should be followed? What happens when there is disagreement? Where does one then go to get the answer? Practically speaking, it is not possible to discover the so-called "mind of the church."

5. Religious Experience (Mysticism)

Many Christians place their own personal experience above what is revealed in Scripture. This is also known as mysticism. While they insist that the Bible alone is their final authority, their personal experience often determines truth. This is very dangerous because experience can be misleading. There needs to be a standard by which the experience is tested.

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Christian experience is a witness to the truth, but it does not determine truth.

For example, how can anyone know when the Lord is “leading” them? Upon what basis can we evaluate our own experience or that of someone else? The only firm foundation for evaluating Christian experience is the teaching of Scripture.

There is, however, a form of true mysticism. God still speaks to His people today through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit illuminates the minds of believers to allow them to understand the truth of the Bible.

Those who are mystics in the biblical sense of the term accept the Scripture as the final authority on all matters. They seek to judge their own personal experience by the Bible. They do not allow personal experience to take precedence over the Bible nor do they judge the Scripture by their own experience. Scripture always has the last word. This is the proper way to approach the subject.

6. Religious Systems

Some Bible-believers place religious systems ahead of the teachings of Scripture. Everything they read and study is understood in light of their pre-determined religious system. While it is helpful to systematize the truths of Scripture, the problem is that the Bible will not so easily fit into these systems. When there is a conflict, it is the Bible that usually bends to the system, rather than the system to the Bible.

This is not the way that it should be done. We have no right to twist the meaning of Scripture to fit some preconceived system. Truth, and our particular view of the truth, may not necessarily be the same thing.

7. Popular Bible Teachers

A mistake that is often made in Christian circles is to elevate the teachings of a popular Bible teacher to the same level as Scripture. While great Bible teachers may provide wonderful insight into the Scriptures, every single thing that they say should be tested. No one, no matter how learned he or she may be, has all the answers. That is why the Scripture tells us to test the spirits. John wrote the following:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1 NET).

This warning includes the teachings of those whom the Lord has given the gift of teaching. All of us who teach God’s Word should have our teachings examined by others, and when necessary, corrected.

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8. The New Testament Only

Some groups reject any teaching from the Old Testament. Although they claim to recognize the entire Bible as authoritative, in reality, they will accept nothing from the Old Testament as having any authority, no matter what the context. This approach is in contradiction to Paul's statement to Timothy. He said:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NKJV).

All Scripture refers to both the Old and New Testament. Everything that God has revealed is profitable for humanity.

9. Only The Things That Are Culturally Relevant

There is also the position that the Bible should only be considered authoritative in those places where it is culturally relevant. This position rejects any part of Scripture that has no relevance for modern humanity. The problem with this view is that each believer decides, for himself or herself, what is relevant and what is not. This takes the authority away from God, and puts it into the hands of sinful humanity. Certainly, this is something which we should not do.

10. Only The Things In The Bible They Like

There is also the tendency of believers to ignore commands that they do not like. Instead of accepting the entire Bible as binding, they pick and choose what parts they will obey, and what parts they will ignore. This robs the Bible of its authority and gives each individual believer the final say concerning what is from God and what is not.

When Christians do anything other than accept the entire Scripture as the authoritative Word of God, they are violating what the Bible says about itself. The Book of Revelation gives this warning:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll (Revelation 22:18,19 NIV).

We are not to add, or subtract, to what God has revealed.

Conclusion: It Is The Scripture Alone That Must Be Our Guide

Consequently, there are a number of things that Christians should be aware of when it comes to the matter as to where final authority actually rests. Although we may say that the Scripture is our final authority, our behavior

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must back up what we say we believe. It is clear that the Bible and that it alone must be our guide. Creeds, doctrinal statements, decisions of church councils, and even the church itself must be judged by Scripture, not the other way around.

Summary To Question 8

What Are Some Of The Things That Christians Mistakenly Emphasize In Place Of Scripture?

Bible-believing Christians sometimes fall into the trap of allowing something apart from the entire Bible to be their ultimate source of authority. Whether it may be church creeds, confessional statements, tradition, a religious experience, the so-called “mind of the church,” a religious system, the doctrine of a popular Bible teacher, the New Testament only, only the things that are culturally relevant, or only the things they like.

None of these should replace the entire Scripture as the ultimate source of authority. The Bible repeatedly commands believers to make their own decisions about spiritual things by searching the Scriptures. The Bible alone should be our final source.

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Question 9

Does The Bible Ever Appeal To Human Reason As A Source Of Authority?

The Protestant position is that the Bible is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. The Scripture, not human reason, is the ultimate source on every issue in which it speaks. Does this mean there is no place for reason? Are we not supposed to think, or use our minds? Just believe?

A number of points need to be made about this issue. They include the following.

1. Our Human Mind Is Limited: This Includes Our Reasoning Powers

Scripture reinforces the fact that the human mind is limited. In the Book of Job, the following question was asked:

Can you discover the essence of God? Can you find out the perfection of the Almighty? It is higher than the heavens—what can you do? It is deeper than Sheol—what can you know? (Job 11:7,8 NET).

We cannot know the perfection of the Almighty. Indeed, the only things we can know about God is what He reveals to us. Otherwise, we can know nothing for certain.

Paul wrote about the limitations of our own human minds when compared with the mighty ways of God. He put it this way in his letter to the Romans:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33 KJV).

God's ways cannot be understood by humans. They are beyond our understanding.

2. The Bible Is Not Against All Human Reasoning Or Thinking

Although unaided human reason cannot come up with any final answers on its own, the Bible does not downplay the use of reason or thinking.

Job Wanted To Reason With God

We read about the patriarch Job wishing to reason with God. The Scripture records Job desiring to speak to God:

Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God (Job 13:3 KJV).

The New Living Translation renders the verse this way:

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Oh, how I long to speak directly to the Almighty. I want to argue my case with God himself (Job 13:3 NLT).

Therefore, the Lord recognizes the desire of humans to reason, or to speak, with Him. He understands our desire to have some sort of communication with Him.

The Lord Encouraged Reasoning With Him

On one occasion, the Lord seemingly encourages reasoning or discussion with Him. We read the following in the Book of the prophet Isaiah:

The New International Version sees this as being argumentative. It says:

“Come now, let us argue this out,” says the LORD. “No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool (Isaiah 1:18 NIV).

The Bible is certainly not against human reason or humans using their reasoning powers. He wants us to think, to weigh and evaluate things.

Paul Spent Time Reasoning With Unbelievers From Scripture

The Bible says that the Apostle Paul reasoned with unbelievers from the Scriptures. We read the following in the Book of Acts:

Paul went to the Jews in the synagogue, as he customarily did, and on three Sabbath days he addressed them from the scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ” (Acts 17:2,3 NET).

Paul went to the synagogues every Sabbath to persuade the people about Jesus being the “Christ,” or “Messiah.” Later, in the Book of Acts, we read about Paul doing this again. The Bible speaks of Paul in this manner:

He addressed both Jews and Greeks in the synagogue every Sabbath, attempting to persuade them (Acts 18:4 NET).

There is another instance recorded in the Book of Acts where Paul went into the synagogues and reasoned with the people:

When they reached Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila behind there, but he himself went into the synagogue and addressed the Jews (Acts 18:19 NET).

Later, it says he reasoned with Felix the governor:

As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified. “Go away for now,” he

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replied. “When it is more convenient, I’ll call for you again” (Acts 24:25 NLT).

Paul certainly found the need to use reason when talking to people about Jesus. The Bible repeatedly challenges people to think for themselves – to make their own decisions about what they believe. These decisions should be based upon what God has revealed.

Human reason has its limits. The people of Berea were applauded for searching the Scripture.

We read in the Book of Acts about their desire to test things by the written Word:

These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11 NET).

Notice that those in Berea were called “opened minded.” Using the Scripture, they examined everything carefully. Therefore, we find that there is both a proper, and an improper, use of reason.

Believers Are Encouraged To Think: To Make Our Own Godly Choices

The Bible encourages believers to make godly choices. This assumes that we have the ability to choose. For example, Joshua emphasized to the people of Israel that they must make their own choice. He said the following:

If you have no desire to worship the Lord, choose today whom you will worship, whether it be the gods whom your ancestors worshiped beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But I and my family will worship the Lord!” (Joshua 24:15 NET).

The Apostle Paul commanded believers to think on those things that are right. He wrote the following to the Philippians:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things (Philippians 4:8 NET).

The New Century Version puts it this way:

Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. (Philippians 4:8 NCV).

All of this assumes that believers can, and should, make godly choices.

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In addition, Paul also said that we should test all things. He wrote to the Thessalonians with the following command:

But examine all things; hold fast to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NET).

Jesus asked His disciples to make a thoughtful decision about Him. We read about this in Matthew:

Then he [Jesus] asked them, “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God?” (Matthew 16:15,16 NLT).

Again, we find that Scripture is not opposed to the godly use of reason. Indeed, not at all.

In fact, Paul said that presenting ourselves to the Lord is “our reasonable worship.” He wrote the following to the Romans:

Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1 NET).

It is reasonable for we believers to present ourselves to the living God in a way which is pleasing to Him.

Consequently, from a study of the Scripture we find that reason has its place. However, Scripture points out that unaided human reason will get us nowhere; we are to reason things out by examining the Scripture. It is the only infallible source of divine truth.

Summary To Question 9 Does The Bible Ever Appeal To Human Reason As A Source Of Authority?

While the Bible, and the Bible alone, is our final guide for all matters of faith and practice, the Bible is not against human reasoning. To the contrary, Scripture encourages people to reason. The Bible encourages people to think; to weigh and evaluate the truth.

What the Bible is against is unaided human reason that attempts to judge Scripture.

None of us are in a position to judge Scripture; it is to judge us! Therefore, reason must always submit itself to the truth of God’s Word. This is the way that God intended it to be.

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Part Two

False Views Of The Bible *Theories That Do Not Fit The Facts*

The Bible is a book that is both human and divine. It is God's Word written in the words of humans. The living God is the ultimate source of the words found in Scripture. This is the biblical view.

Throughout history, there have been a number of inadequate views which have arisen about the divine inspiration of Scripture. These views have been held by Christians and non-Christians alike.

For example, many have assumed that the words of the Bible were dictated by God to the various authors; they had no real involvement in its composition. The biblical writers automatically wrote what God told them.

Others see the Bible as a result of the religious genius on the part of the authors with no involvement with God whatsoever. They reject any idea of divine inspiration.

These particular views, along with many others, incorrectly explain the divine nature of Scripture. In this section, we will look at a number of these inadequate theories and show how they do not reflect what the Bible says about itself.

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Question 10

What Are Some Inadequate Theories Of The Bible's Inspiration And Authority?

The Bible is the textbook for Christians. It is the authoritative Word of God to the human race. Unfortunately, over the years, a number of inadequate theories about the inspiration and authority of Scripture have been proposed. Unhappily, these theories have become popular with many people, both Christians and non-Christians. This being the case, it is necessary that we know something about them and why they are not consistent with what the Bible teaches about itself.

These inadequate theories about the authority of the Bible can be briefly listed as follows.

1. The Mechanical Dictation Theory

Mechanical dictation argues that the writers of Scripture were merely passive stenographers who were not at all personally involved in the composition of the text. The production of Scripture was entirely a divine work. This view would hold that there is no human element in Scripture whatsoever.

2. The Idea Of Partial Authority

Partial authority has the Scripture as being God's Word – but only in certain parts. The authority of Scripture is limited to certain sections. The only teachings in the Bible that are divinely inspired are those that would be unknowable to the human authors. Therefore, a person cannot merely quote any section of the Bible as authoritative Scripture since some parts are not authoritative. According to this view, it is crucial that we are able to distinguish the authoritative from the non-authoritative parts.

3. The Bible Has Authoritative Concepts But Not Authoritative Words

This theory argues that only the original concepts that God gave to the writers of the Bible were divinely inspired. However, the choice of words was entirely left up to the writer. The writer then put what God originally told him into his own words—not God's words. Consequently, we end up with a Bible that consists of human explanations of what God revealed to the various writers.

4. The Natural Inspiration Theory

Natural inspiration treats the Bible like any other book. It is literature that inspires the heart, but it is not the Word of God. It sees the Scripture as a mere human production. Therefore, it is not any greater, or more authoritative, than other human writings.

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5. The Illumination Theory

This view says that the ability to write Holy Scripture is something that is part of the nature of every believer. Therefore, Scripture is not limited to what we find in the Bible. Anyone who has the Holy Spirit of God is able to compose divine truth.

6. The Encounter View (Barthian View, Neoorthodox View)

The encounter view says the Bible becomes God's Word only when the reader interacts with it. This theory believes the Scripture contains errors and contradictions. However, it says that the Word of God still comes through to the reader in spite of these imperfections.

7. The Mythological View

The mythological view holds that people can actually encounter God through a reading of the Bible but they reject all accounts of miracles and the supernatural. The miracles stories in the Bible are accused of being nothing but myths and fables.

This briefly sums up these seven inadequate theories of the Bible's inspiration and authority.

Summary To Question 10

What Are Some Inadequate Theories Of The Bible's Inspiration And Authority?

In the history of the church a number of inadequate theories concerning the authority of Scripture have been proposed. One of the most popular is the idea that the Scripture was mechanically dictated to the various writers—the mechanical dictation theory. There is also the idea that only parts of the Bible have authority—the partial inspiration theory. Some hold that it is not the words of Scripture that are authoritative but merely the concepts—the inspired concept theory.

A popular view among unbelievers is that the Bible is like any other book—natural inspiration. The illumination theory of inspiration says that the ability to compose Scripture resides in every believer.

The encounter view says the Bible only becomes the word of God when a person reads it and personally encounters Christ. The mythological view denies all supernatural elements in Scripture but it still argues that people can experience God through reading the Bible.

None of these theories is consistent with what the Scripture teaches about its own nature and authority. When they are examined in the light of the teachings of the Bible, each of them is found to be an insufficient explanation of the facts.

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Question 11

Was The Bible Dictated By God To Humanity? (Mechanical Dictation)

It is a popular idea that the Bible is a result of God dictating every word to the writers of Scripture. The writers then merely recorded the words God spoke to them. This would make the end result entirely divine with no human elements whatsoever. This theory is known by a number of different names including the “mechanical dictation theory” or simply the “dictation theory.” This theory can be summed up in the following manner.

Claim: The Words Of Scripture Were Dictated By God To The Human Writers

According to this theory, the human authors of the Bible were like passive stenographers who recorded the truth of God in the same manner as a recording device records the voice of the speaker. This view teaches that the entire Bible was dictated word for word by God. The personality of the writer was set aside to preserve the writings from any possible error. It is supported from a number of passages in the Old Testament where God tells the writer exactly what to say to the people.

The Bible, therefore, would have been similar to what Muslims claim for the Koran—their holy book. Supposedly it had been dictated from heaven in the Arabic language to their prophet Muhammad. The Bible, it is argued, came about in the same way.

The idea of the verbal dictation of the Old Testament can be found in the writings of the Jewish Talmud, and the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria. Some of the Church Fathers believed the New Testament came about by some type of verbal dictation.

Some Parts Were Dictated By God

It is true that some parts of the Bible were dictated by God and then recorded by the writer. This includes the following parts of Scripture.

The Ten Commandments Were Dictated By God

In the introduction to the Ten Commandments the Scripture says the following:

And God spoke all these words (Exodus 20:1 NIV).

Moses merely recorded what God said. He did not compose any of it.

God Told Isaiah What To Say

God told Isaiah the prophet to say certain words to the king. The Bible says:

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The Lord told Isaiah, “Go and tell Hezekiah: ‘This is what the Lord God of your ancestor David says: ‘I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Look, I will add fifteen years to your life, and rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will shield this city’” (Isaiah 38:4-6 NET).

In this case, Isaiah spoke and wrote exactly what God told Him. He did not add his own words to what the Lord had said.

It is also possible that other sections of Scripture prefaced by, “Thus says the Lord,” are examples of dictation. The biblical writers would reproduce what God said to them “word for word.”

Parts Of The Book Of Revelation Were Dictated By Jesus To The Apostle John

We also find dictation in the New Testament. Revelation 2:1-3:22 was dictated by Jesus Christ to John the Apostle. For example, Jesus told John to write the message that He dictated to the various churches. John wrote:

On the Lord’s day the Spirit took control of me, and behind me I heard a loud voice that sounded like a trumpet. The voice said, “Write in a book what you see. Then send it to the seven churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea” (Revelation 1:10-11 CEV).

Jesus told John exactly what to write. The Bible records Jesus saying:

This is what you must write to the angel of the church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1 CEV).

The same dictation of Jesus to John occurred seven different times with different messages to the seven churches.

Therefore, it is clear that some parts of Scripture were dictated by God and recorded by the writers.

This Viewpoint Wants To Protect The Bible From Error

This view is sometimes likened to automatic writing where the person is guided to write something by an external force. The idea is that the writer has no real participation in the contents—he is merely the vehicle through which the writing occurs. Christians who have held this view see it as protecting the Bible from any human error. They reason that if humans had no involvement in the composition of Scripture, then it is not possible for the Scripture to be in error.

What are we to make of this theory?

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Response To The Mechanical Dictation View

The mechanical dictation theory, or the idea of automatic writing, does not fit all the evidence.

1. Only A Few Parts Were Dictated

Although a few small parts of Scripture were dictated by God to humanity, this is not the case for the entire Scripture. It has never been the teaching of the majority of the church that the Bible resulted by some sort of dictation from God to the authors. God used a number of different ways to communicate His words to the biblical authors.

It is clear that the authors were not machines who automatically wrote what God dictated to them.

2. Dictation Does Not Protect The Bible From Error

Dictation, by itself, would not protect the Bible from error. There would always be the possibility that the writer would hear inaccurately. Even if he heard God correctly, he would still have to write down correctly what he heard. An error could occur in either of these two steps. Therefore, the only way in which complete accuracy could be guaranteed would be by some sort of automatic writing where God actually took absolute control of the person. The Bible does not teach that this is what happened.

3. The Evidence Shows The Bible Was Not Dictated

The following points clearly demonstrate that God did not mechanically dictate the totality of the Scriptures to humanity.

The Style Would Have Been Uniform Throughout, It Is Not

If God had dictated the Scriptures to the various writers, the writing style would be uniform throughout each of the sixty-six books. It would be the sentence structure and vocabulary of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture would be free from all trace of humanity. Yet this is not what we find when we examine the pages of Scripture. The style of writing of the various books of Scripture is anything but uniform. Therefore, we have no indication whatsoever that the words were dictated. The evidence is as follows.

There Are Different Styles And Personalities In The Books Of The Bible

The idea of dictation is easy to refute when one looks at the different biblical books. Each writer has his own personality, style, and vocabulary.

For example, the New Testament writings of John are in sharp contrast with those of Luke. John writes in very simple Greek with a limited vocabulary, while Luke writes a much better style of Greek showing greater familiarity with the language.

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Many of the biblical books contain passages where the author's temperament and previous training are revealed. This is hardly consistent with some idea of mechanical dictation.

For example, the language of the Apostle Paul runs the gamut of emotions. It is hard to reconcile some of the sections where Paul's personality is evident with the idea that he was simply a stenographer. He wrote the following to the church at Rome:

I am telling the truth in Christ (I am not lying!), for my conscience assures me in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed—cut off from Christ—for the sake of my people, my fellow countrymen (Romans 9:1-3 NET).

The Contemporary English Version translates it as follows:

I am a follower of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is a witness to my conscience. So I tell the truth and I am not lying when I say my heart is broken and I am in great sorrow. I would gladly be placed under God's curse and be separated from Christ for the good of my own people (Romans 9:1-3 CEV).

Paul's emotions are clearly reflected in these verses. No dictation, or automatic writing, occurred here.

The Authors Were From Different Ranks Of Society: Their Writings Show This

Furthermore, God chose the various human authors of Scripture from all ranks of society. Each of them wrote from their various backgrounds that included different occupations, different amounts of education, and different languages.

All of the differences are reflected in their writings. For example, only Luke/Acts and the Book of Hebrews could be classified as "good writing." The writings of John the Apostle, especially in the Book of Revelation, have a number of examples of non-standard grammatical constructions.

In addition, we find in Luke's gospel a number of medical terms used. This is consistent with his training as a physician. However, we do not find the same use of these medical terms in the other gospels.

We Find Different Literary Devices In Scripture

The writers of Scripture employed different literary devices. For example, the Apostle Paul used allegory (Galatians 4) in his comparison of Sarah the wife of Abraham and Hagar his concubine. This is not consistent with mechanical dictation.

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There Are Grammatical Irregularities

We also find grammatical irregularities in Scripture. For example, some of the sentences found in the Book of Revelation do not conform to standard grammar. In addition, Paul writes a number of broken sentences. All of this is inconsistent with the idea of dictation from God. If God wrote each of the books of the Bible, then we would have similar styles and faultless grammar. We have neither.

The Bible Was Written In The Third Person

If God mechanically dictated His words to humanity, then we would expect the Bible to have been written in the first person, "I." Instead we find the Bible describing God in the third person, "He." The humans were the actual writers.

4. Some Scripture Was A Result Of Historical Investigation

Not all writers of Scripture depicted themselves as recording what God told them. Sometimes the words of the biblical writers resulted from their own careful investigation. Luke wrote his gospel by consulting previous works as well as doing his own research. He wrote:

Many have tried to report on the things that happened among us. They have written the same things that we learned from others--the people who saw those things from the beginning and served God by telling people his message. Since I myself have studied everything carefully from the beginning, most excellent Theophilus, it seemed good for me to write it out for you. I arranged it in order, to help you know that what you have been taught is true (Luke 1:1-4 NCV).

The biblical writers did research, and then they reflected upon that which they had researched. Eventually they wrote down the results of their reflection. This entire process was guided by the Holy Spirit.

The biblical writers also made use of non-biblical sources. We find this to be true in both testaments. The fact that a number of these writings are mentioned shows that other historical materials were available, and sometimes were consulted at the time the Scriptures were written.

5. Some Material Was Already Written

Some material that found its way into the Bible had been previously written. For example, the writers of Scripture used already written genealogies (Matthew 1:1-18, Luke 3:23-37). They incorporated this written material into the text.

While the human authors of Scripture did, at times, use some pre-existing materials, the Holy Spirit supernaturally controlled the writers and their writings. Consequently, their finished product was without error.

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6. There Was Some Editing Of Scripture

There was also editing by human hands. We are told that the Proverbs of Solomon were edited by the men of Hezekiah:

These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of King Hezekiah of Judah copied (Proverbs 25:1 NET).

The fact that certain writings in Scripture were later edited testifies against the idea of some type of mechanical dictation. God certainly would not have to edit Himself!

7. There Are Differing Accounts Of The Same Episode

We also have differing accounts of the same event—something that is inconsistent with mechanical dictation. For example, the wording of the inscription that was over the cross of Jesus is different in all four gospels. Matthew wrote:

They put a sign above Jesus' head with a charge against him. It said: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. (Matthew 27:37 NCV).

Mark records it in this manner:

There was a sign with this charge against Jesus written on it: THE KING OF THE JEWS (Mark 15:26 NCV).

Luke's gospel reads differently than Matthew's gospel:

At the top of the cross these words were written: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS (Luke 23:38 NCV).

John's gospel read differently than the other three:

Pilate wrote a sign and put it on the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS (John 19:19 NCV).

The fact that each gospel writer records a different wording on the inscription above Jesus' cross is inconsistent with mechanical dictation.

8. Not Everything Was Original With The Writer

There is also the possibility that some of the psalms may have actually used well-known writings and changed the words to honor the God of Scripture. Psalm 29 is usually given as an example of this. The psalm is similar to a pagan writing that honors the storm-god Baal. It has been argued that the writer of the psalm, traditionally viewed as being David, actually took this pagan work, and changed the wording to honor the Lord—the true God of nature.

Among other reasons, he may have done this to show the Canaanites that it is Yahweh, the God of Israel, who is the only true God and that gods

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like Baal do not really exist. Thus, he took a hymn to a false god that was familiar to him, and changed the words to honor the Lord.

If this is what happened, then we have a case of a writer, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, taking an existing pagan writing, or at least the main ideas from an existing writing, and changing the words to honor the true God. If this actually happened then certainly no one could argue the idea of mechanical dictation on the part of the biblical writer because the original writer was an unbeliever. It must be noted, however, that not every Christian accepts that this is what was done with Psalm 29—it is only a possibility.

Conclusion: There Are Not Just Two Choices— The Bible Was Either Divine Or Human: The Bible Is Both Human And Divine

Some would have us believe that there are only two possible ways in which the Bible could have come to humanity. The first choice is that God dictated every word of the Bible to humans. This would guarantee the accuracy of the finished result. There would be no mistakes because humans were never involved in the process.

The second choice said humans alone were involved in the recording of Scripture. This would result in legends, mistakes, and inaccuracies. But neither of these is true. God divinely inspired the biblical writers to use their own personalities, vocabularies, and writing styles to impart His Word to humanity. This is where the evidence leads us.

Summary To Question 11 Was The Bible Dictated By God To Humanity? (Mechanical Dictation)

The mechanical dictation theory teaches the writers of the Scripture were passive as God spoke His Word through them. Rather than writing with their own words and vocabulary, they were more like stenographers or automatic writers. This would guarantee the Scripture would be without error. There are indeed portions of Scripture, such as the Ten Commandments, where God dictated His Word to humanity.

However, the idea of mechanical dictation does not account for all aspects of the Bible. There is no evidence that God always dictated the Scripture to the various authors of the biblical books. For one thing the vocabulary and style of the various books of the Bible is not uniform – this is something one would not expect had each author merely wrote down what God had told him to write. For example, the style and vocabulary of Luke is much different from John.

Also, the writings of Paul express a variety of different personal emotions —this is not something that a stenographer does.

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If the writers were mere stenographers, then we would expect the Scriptures to have been written in the first person rather than the third person. But we do not find this.

In addition, the writers do not depict themselves as being stenographers. Luke used sources for his gospel. Also, both he and Matthew incorporated genealogies that had already been written. This is hardly keeping with the idea of the writers being passive stenographers.

There is also the different rendering of the same event. For example, we find all four gospels giving a different wording of the writing over the cross of Jesus. This is inconsistent with the idea of dictation.

Scripture teaches that God spoke through the unique personalities of the biblical writers. The Holy Spirit approved the written words of the various books of the Bible as the various writers expressed them. This was accomplished without the author's being mere stenographers.

Since the Holy Spirit was the actual source of what was written, He made certain that the writers used the correct words to express God's truth. Consequently, the Scriptures were supernaturally protected from error.

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Question 12

What Is The Partial Inspiration Theory? (The Bible Contains The Word Of God)

The partial inspiration theory holds to the divine authority of Scripture, but it believes that some parts are not authoritative or God-breathed. According to this theory the Bible is not the Word of God—the Bible *contains* the Word of God.

Claim: Only Parts Of The Bible Are Divinely Inspired

Those who hold to a partial inspiration, or partial authority of Scripture, usually argue that God's truth still may be found among the writings, even though there are parts that contain contradictions and errors. They believe it is not necessary to argue that all parts of Scripture are divinely authoritative or accurate.

Some people who hold this theory believe that only the teachings that were unknowable to the human authors were divinely inspired. Information that humans could discover on their own was not divinely revealed or kept from human error. Therefore, only the parts of Scripture that deal with unseen spiritual realities, such as God, angels, heaven, and hell, are correctly reported. The other portions of the Bible may contain errors.

Response To The Partial Inspiration Theory

A few observations need to be made about this view. They are as follows.

1. How Do We Know Which Parts To Trust?

The main problem with this theory is how to determine which parts are divinely inspired, and which are not. Who makes the call? Each person would end up making their own Bible to fit their own desires. In doing so, they would be switching roles with God. There would be no ultimate source of authority.

Making a distinction between those areas which can be known by humans and those which cannot be known does not help us either. Basically, it is saying that in areas in which we can investigate, such as historical events, the Bible may be in error. In other words, the event did not happen the way the Bible says that it did.

On the other hand, we are supposed to believe that the spiritual realities recorded in the Bible, which are impossible for us to investigate, are reported with one hundred per cent accuracy! Thus, we are to believe the Bible contains errors in areas which we can investigate but are to believe that the Bible is always accurate in areas we cannot investigate. Obviously, this theory is not very convincing.

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2. No Two People Agree On What Constitutes Scripture

In addition, there would be no consensus as to which parts come from God, and which do not. Since people cannot agree upon which parts of Scripture to trust and which parts not to trust, this theory is meaningless.

For example, there are those who only want to believe the words of Jesus, and not the words of the apostles.

However, such a viewpoint contradicts the teachings of Christ. Jesus entrusted His own authority to His apostles. Indeed, the complete explanation of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and heavenly ministry comes from the ministry of the apostles—not from teaching in the life of Christ. If a person rejects the full trustworthiness of the Scripture, then they will come up with an explanation of Jesus' life and ministry that fundamentally differs from that of the New Testament.

3. All Scripture Is Considered Authoritative

The position of Scripture is that all of it is God-breathed—not just some of it. Paul wrote the following to Timothy:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NIV).

While some parts of Scripture may be more relevant than others, all Scripture is equally divinely inspired or God-breathed. Furthermore, all parts are important in God's revelation of His overall plan for the world. Nowhere do we find Scripture even hinting that God divinely inspires some parts, while other parts are not inspired.

Furthermore, to disbelieve any part of the Scripture is to disbelieve God. On the day of His resurrection, Jesus rebuked two of His own disciples for not believing what all of the Old Testament had to say about Him. Luke writes:

Then Jesus said to them, "You are foolish and slow to believe everything the prophets said. They said that the Christ must suffer these things before he enters his glory." Then starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27 NCV).

To be consistent, we must believe everything that the Scripture says.

Conclusion: Partial Inspiration Gives Humanity No Ultimate Standard Of Authority

The uniqueness of divine inspiration rules out the possibility of either a partial inspiration of Scripture or various degrees of inspiration. All of

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Scripture is equally divinely inspired by God the Holy Spirit. The Bible must be completely inspired of God to have any type of divine authority. We must remember that the first recorded attack of the devil was against God's Word. In the Garden of Eden, we read of the following encounter with Eve and the snake:

The snake was sneakier than any of the other wild animals that the Lord God had made. One day it came to the woman and asked, "Did God tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?" The woman answered, "God said we could eat fruit from any tree in the garden, except the one in the middle. He told us not to eat fruit from that tree or even to touch it. If we do, we will die." "No, you won't!" the snake replied. "God understands what will happen on the day you eat fruit from that tree. You will see what you have done, and you will know the difference between right and wrong, just as God does" (Genesis 3:1-5 CEV).

The snake denied that God had spoken truthfully. Nothing has really changed since that time. Denial that God has truthfully spoken, even if only in certain parts of Scripture, is still a denial of God's Word. The Bible teaches that God's Word is truthful in all its words and in all its parts. Anything less is not the view the Bible has of itself.

Summary To Question 12 **What Is The Partial Inspiration Theory?** **(The Bible Contains The Word Of God)**

The partial inspiration theory admits the Word of God is somewhere contained in Scripture, but that God's Word should not be equated with Scripture. There are portions of Scripture that contain God's Word while other portions do not. God's truth may still be found in the Bible despite errors and contradictions.

This theory, although popular in some circles, is meaningless. It is not logical to choose certain parts of the Bible to believe that fit ones own view of the world. First, there is the problem of determining which parts of the Bible are authoritative and which are not. There is no divine standard to make this judgment. Everyone ends up making his or her own decision as to what belongs and what does not. They become the standard of authority. Also this theory is against the teaching of the Bible. Nowhere do we have the slightest hint that some parts of the Bible are authoritative, while others are not. Consequently, the theory of the partial inspiration of Scripture is not really an option for those who take the Bible seriously.

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Question 13

What Is The Dynamic Theory Of The Bible's Authority? (Divinely Inspired Thoughts, Not Words)

One of the views of the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture, which has become popular in recent years, is known as the “dynamic theory” of inspiration. It can be summed up as follows.

Claims: Only The Original Thoughts Were God-Given. The Writers Used Their Own Words To Express The Thoughts

The dynamic view of the Bible's authority says it is only the thoughts, or concepts, that are really divinely inspired, but not the actual words of the writers. That is, God initially divinely inspired the writers of Scripture but left them to use their own words and expressions in describing the truth that He revealed to them. Divine inspiration only occurred at that initial moment when God communicated to the authors of Scripture; the process did not continue through the writing of Scripture.

Response

We can make a number of observations about this theory. They are as follows.

1. This Theory Wrongly Emphasizes The Human Part Of The Process

Those who hold this view are often reacting against a mechanical approach that sees God almost dictating word-for-word what the Scriptures should say. It attempts to emphasize the human aspect of the composition of the Bible. The human aspect of the Scripture should be appreciated. While this view attempts to balance the divine/human aspect of Scripture it falls short of the biblical position. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

2. How Do We Know They Correctly Understood God?

This view opens the door to an enormous number of problems. If divine inspiration only occurred at the moment of initial contact between God and the writer, and dealt with their thoughts and not their words, then how can we be certain they chose the right words? How are we able to discern between the writer's own fallible opinions, and God's thoughts? Why should we have confidence in the Bible if the forty plus authors were left to their own particular way of stating God's truth as it had initially been revealed to them?

Why should we assume their final product was always correct on every matter? Ultimately, we cannot if we hold this viewpoint. Truth would be mixed with error. Our problem would be that we have no way of knowing how much error was mixed in by the writers.

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3. The Entire Process Is Divinely Inspired

The biblical view is that the process of divine inspiration did not end with the initial contact between God and the authors of Scripture. It continued throughout their composition of the work until each biblical book was finished. We should not assume that God left the human authors to their own devices after the momentary event of divine inspiration. There is no evidence whatsoever that He did something like this.

4. This View Confuses Inspiration And Illumination

This view also confuses inspiration and illumination. The emphasis in Scripture is on divinely inspired written words, not divinely inspired writers. It is not the process, but rather the end product that is stressed. It is all Scripture that is God-breathed, not all writers. Paul wrote:

Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live. The Scriptures train God's servants to do all kinds of good deeds (2 Timothy 3:16,17 CEV).

Peter stressed that no part of Scripture originated with human beings. He wrote:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21 NIV).

The point is that God is the One who originated all of Scripture. It also says He carried the writers along as they spoke and wrote God's Word.

5. The Bible Says Words Are Important

The Bible also teaches that the actual words used in Scripture are important. Indeed, Jesus emphasized the importance of His actual words. He said:

The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life (John 6:63 NET).

Paul said the words he spoke were not with human wisdom but rather divinely given. He wrote to the Corinthians:

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:13 NKJV).

The New Century Version translates the verse in this manner:

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And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom but with words taught us by the Spirit. And so we explain spiritual truths to spiritual people (1 Corinthians 2:13 NCV).

Paul says that God's revelation comes to humankind, not just in thoughts or concepts, but also in specific words. Divine inspiration extends to the concepts, the wording, and the words.

To be completely reliable the authority of Scripture must extend to the words, as well as the thoughts. We understand the thoughts of the biblical writers only through the words they use.

Conclusion: The Concepts, As Well As The Words, Are Divinely Inspired

There is another point we must stress. The concepts in Scripture are also divinely inspired. We do not have to make the choice between the individual words being divinely given, or merely the concepts as being divinely inspired. God gave both the words and the concepts. Consequently, the end result is that the actual wording of Scripture, as well as the concepts, is exactly what God intended. Thus, the entire Bible, words and concepts, is the authoritative Word of God.

Summary To Question 13

What Is The Dynamic Theory Of The Bible's Authority? (Divinely Inspired Thoughts, Not Words)

The dynamic view of inspiration argues that God initially divinely inspired the various writers with His thoughts, but then left the composition of these thoughts up to each individual. The divine truths that were revealed to the biblical authors were put in their own words. Therefore, it is the concepts of Scripture that are important—not each word.

The problems are as follows. If each writer were left to express God's thoughts in their own way, then how do we know they expressed it correctly? Unless someone wants to argue that each of these writers was absolutely perfect, the logical result would be some errors in the transmission. Then of course we have the problem of finding these errors.

As can be readily seen, this idea is ultimately meaningless. No one would have any idea as to which statements contained in the Bible were true and which were not.

The dynamic view falls short of what the Scripture says about its divine inspiration. While it is important to recognize the human side of divine inspiration, it is also important to note that the divine guidance did not end with the initial contact between God and the various writers. Inspiration is a process with the emphasis on the final result, not the initial contact. Consequently, the theory of dynamic inspiration leaves much to be desired.

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Question 14

What Is Natural Inspiration? (Intuition Theory)

One of the more popular theories among those who reject the authority of the Bible, yet want to praise it for its literary qualities, is known as the “natural inspiration” theory. This is also known as the “intuition theory.” It is important that we understand this well-accepted idea of the nature of the Bible.

Claim: The Bible Is Merely A Human Production

Natural inspiration totally denies the supernatural element in Scripture. It holds that the writers of Scripture were simply men of religious genius who possessed unique spiritual insight. Their writings on moral and spiritual truth were ahead of their contemporaries.

Consequently, they wrote the books of the Bible in the same way as any other book has been written. The ideas ultimately came from their own religious insights, not from God Himself. Thus, there is no divine authority to be found in the Bible.

Response To Natural Inspiration

A number of comments need to be made about this theory which attributes Scripture to human genius rather than to God.

1. The Bible Is Both Human And Divine

This viewpoint only sees the human side of Scripture - it does not recognize anything divine. The proper view is that the Scriptures are both human and divine. God used human beings to reveal His thoughts and His truths; the Bible is not merely the result of human genius or human religious insight.

In addition, the Bible nowhere teaches that the writers of Scripture were “inspired men.” It is not the writers, but the writings which were divinely inspired. Paul wrote the following to the Corinthians:

When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths (1 Corinthians 2:13 NLT).

The words they used were not words of human wisdom, but of divine wisdom given to them by the living God.

In fact, we find that some of those who spoke the words of God were of a defective character, such as the Old Testament prophet Balaam. However, the words which he uttered and were recorded were the words of God. Therefore, the Bible does not teach that its words were produced by some special class of “inspired individuals.”

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In addition, Peter tells us that the prophets did not always understand the things which they said or wrote. He said:

This salvation was something the prophets wanted to know more about. They prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you, even though they had many questions as to what it all could mean. They wondered what the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They wondered when and to whom all this would happen (1 Peter 1:10-11 NLT).

According to this passage, these people who spoke forth the Word of God did not always understand what they had said or what they had written. This shows that their writings were not the production of their intellect or insight.

Therefore, divine inspiration, when properly understood, has nothing to do with the ability of the writers themselves. The Bible is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit to produce, in written form, the words God wanted to convey. It has nothing to do with the ability of the writers. Our faith is in the final result of what they wrote, God's Word. Our faith is not in the men who wrote it.

2. This View Contradicts The Claims Of Scripture

The natural inspiration view is in direct contradiction to what the writers themselves testified about what they said and what they wrote. When Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, he said the following:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NIV).

The writers of Scripture believed that were writing the very words of God—not their own religious insights.

3. It Ignores The Supernatural Character Of God's Word

The theory of natural inspiration empties the term "inspiration" of its biblical meaning by ignoring its supernatural character. If the Bible is merely a human book, then why cannot the unbeliever understand it? Paul wrote about the lack of ability on the part of the unbeliever to comprehend spiritual truth. He put it this way:

The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14 NET).

Paul explained why the unbeliever cannot understand Scripture—it is spiritually discerned. The unbeliever does not have the proper equipment.

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Conclusion: The Bible Is Not A Mere Human Production: It Is The Word Of God

If the Bible only came about as a result of natural inspiration, then why haven't we seen more books like it written? Why no improvement on Scripture in the last two thousand years? Should we not expect more writings that would be equal to or superior to the Scripture?

When Jesus prayed to God the Father, shortly before His death on the cross, He stated that the Word of the Father is truth. He said:

Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth (John 17:17 NLT).

Jesus did not merely say that God's Word was "true" He said that His word was "truth." The Word of God is the standard of truth.

This is an important distinction. It is one thing to say that God's Word is true, or correct, but it is something else entirely to make it the highest possible standard—truth. This is exactly what Jesus did. He said that "truth" is what God's says. Therefore, we can rightly conclude that the Bible is "truth."

Summary To Question 14 What Is Natural Inspiration? (Intuition Theory)

The idea of natural inspiration does not fit the facts. The Bible cannot be categorized with other books, or its authors with other human authors. Scripture is inspired in the sense that God supernaturally spoke through the human writers to reveal His authoritative truth to humanity—it is not merely some book that inspires the human heart. In addition, we are told that those without the Spirit of God are unable to understand Scripture. Why then is this the case, if the Bible is merely a human production?

If the Bible is limited to human thought alone, then why is there only one such book? Whatever humans have produced in the past has usually been improved upon with time. Why hasn't any human written a work that has surpassed the Bible? The answer is simple—the Bible is a one-of-a-kind book because God's unique authority stands behind it. The natural inspiration, or intuition theory, is not in any way biblical.

Finally, Jesus stated that God's Words were truth—not just true. Therefore, the words of Scripture are the ultimate standard on all matters that it touches.

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Question 15

What Is The Illumination Theory Of The Authority Of Scripture?

One theory regarding the divine inspiration of the Bible, which is contrary to what Scripture says, argues that it is possible for every believer to write Scripture. This is known as the “illumination theory.”

Claim: Any Believer Has The Ability To Write Scripture

Simply put, this theory holds that the ability possessed by the writers of the Bible, to compose Holy Scripture, is something that is common to all Christians in every age. Those who hold this theory believe there is the capability within each human being which allows them to receive insight into divine mysteries. This ability is known as “illumination.”

The Bible, therefore, was a result of God’s Spirit heightening the religious perception of the writers. This point of view holds that present-day believers could still write Scripture as God’s Spirit comes upon them. It sees the Bible inspired in the same way as a present-day preacher proclaiming the message of Scripture. What are we to make of the illumination theory?

Response To The Illumination Theory

This theory contradicts what the Bible says in a number of ways. This can be seen by examining the following evidence.

1. This View Confuses Divine Inspiration And Illumination

The illumination theory confuses divine inspiration and illumination. Divine inspiration is the special ability that God granted to certain individuals to write Holy Scripture. It was only given to a few individuals and only for a limited duration. It has not been in operation since the time Jesus’ apostles lived upon the earth.

On the other hand, the influence of illumination is common to all Christians from the time of the apostles until the present. Illumination is how the Holy Spirit helps believers understand the things of God that are revealed in the Scripture. Only the believer in Jesus Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is able to understand these truths of God. Paul emphasized this as he wrote to the Corinthians:

The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14 NET).

The New Century Version translates this verse in the following manner:

A person who does not have the Spirit does not accept the truths that come from the Spirit of God. That person thinks they are foolish and

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cannot understand them, because they can only be judged to be true by the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:14 NCV).

Therefore, this view fails to distinguish between the biblical prophet and the preacher. Divine inspiration was limited to a select group of people that God chose to write Scripture; it is not the same as God presently guiding individuals to preach His message. Today, preachers and Bible teachers can make mistakes in the preparation and delivering of God's truth to His people. However, the biblical writers were supernaturally guided so that they did not make mistakes.

The distinction between divine inspiration, and illumination, needs to be understood to avoid confusion.

2. At Times The Biblical Writers Did Not Understand What They Recorded

There is another point that is fatal to this theory—the biblical writers did not always understand what they were writing. Sometimes the biblical writers did not comprehend the full meaning of their writings. We are told the prophets, at certain times, received truths by divine inspiration but were denied illumination for the comprehension of these same truths. Peter himself wrote about this:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who predicted the grace that would come to you searched and investigated carefully. They probed into what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he testified beforehand about the sufferings appointed for Christ and his subsequent glory. They were shown that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things now announced to you through those who evangelized you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things angels long to catch a glimpse of (1 Peter 1:10-12 NET).

Although the Holy Spirit divinely inspired their words, He did not always see fit to give them the understanding of what they meant. Therefore, the words of Scripture did not come about when certain human beings grasped divine truth. It was the result of God supernaturally working in the lives of certain writers to record His truth, and this truth was not always understood by the writers.

3. If This Theory Is True, Then Why Hasn't More Scripture Been Written?

If the Scriptures were merely the result of an illumination possessed by all believers, then why haven't we had any further revelation since the first century? Why don't we have a new Bible written today? There would certainly be no reason to deny this possibility if Scripture were merely the result of a gift given to all believers. Yet we do not find any examples of godly people writing new Scripture since the time of the apostles.

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4. **No More Scripture Has Been Given Since The First Century**

There is no biblical evidence that God continued to divinely inspire writers after the New Testament era. To the contrary, Jude informs us that the faith has been “once and for all delivered.” He wrote:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3 NKJV).

There is no need for any more divine revelation where God divinely inspires writers to set forth His truth. The truth of Scripture is now complete. The writer to the Hebrews said that God has spoken with finality through Jesus Christ. He said:

After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, in these last days he has spoken to us in a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he created the world (Hebrews 1:1,2 NET).

The Contemporary English Version reads:

Long ago in many ways and at many times God’s prophets spoke his message to our ancestors. But now at last, God sent his Son to bring his message to us. God created the universe by his Son, and everything will someday belong to the Son (Hebrews 1:1,2 CEV).

There is no further need for God to supernaturally reveal His truth to all humanity. He has said all that He needs to say.

Conclusion: Divine Inspiration Was Limited To A Select Few

Divine inspiration was limited to a small group of men whom God specifically chose to use to put His Word in written form to humankind.

It is not a universally shared experience among believers. In addition, not everyone who had the gift of prophecy was divinely inspired to write Scripture. Therefore, divine inspiration does not occur in the present day.

Summary To Question 15

What Is The Illumination Theory Of The Authority Of Scripture?

The illumination theory of the authority of Scripture says that the writers of the Bible achieved a certain understanding of God’s truth, and then revealed it to humanity. That spiritual ability, it is argued, resides in each believer. Consequently, it would be possible for any enlightened believer to receive and deliver God’s truth, as did the biblical writers.

Illumination, however, is not the same thing as divine inspiration. Divine inspiration consists of God originally giving His truth, while illumination

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refers to human beings understanding that truth. The illumination theory of inspiration confuses the two.

Furthermore, the Bible gives example of biblical writers who did not understand what God had revealed to them. This demonstrates they had not reached some spiritual plateau to be able to receive God's Word. In addition, if this were true in the past, then why is it not true today? Why don't we see more Scripture being written?

This theory opens the door for any believer to compose Holy Scripture when given insights by God. However, this is not necessary because God has spoken with finality in the New Testament. There is no need for any more divine revelation.

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Question 16

What Is The Encounter View Of The Bible's Authority? (Barthian, Neoorthodox)

There is an inadequate view of the Bible's authority known as the "encounter view," the "Barthian" or the "Neoorthodox view." This theory comes from the late Swiss theologian Karl Barth. This complex view of the Bible's divine inspiration has become popular among many people. It can be summed up as follows.

Claim: The Bible Becomes God's Word When Personally Encountered

The Bible is not God's written Word as such. It is only when an individual personally encounters Jesus Christ does the Bible become the Word of God for them. Accordingly, there is no such thing as an objective written Word of God.

The Bible Is Like Other Books

The encounter view sees the Bible as similar to other books. What makes the Bible unique is the ability of the Holy Spirit to reveal truth for those who read it. In that sense, individual people, as well as churches, encounter God through the Bible by means of the work of the Holy Spirit. According to the encounter view, divine inspiration is an ongoing process since God continues to reveal His truth to all of those who read the Bible. Consequently, the Bible becomes revelation at the time the person or church is reading it.

The Bible Becomes God's Word When Christ Is Personally Encountered

This view teaches the Bible is not the Word of God, but only becomes the Word of God through a special encounter when God speaks to a person in some kind of subjective religious experience. In other words, the Bible only witnesses to the Word of God, but it is not the Word of God. Those who hold this position are constantly looking for the Word of God behind the words of the Bible.

According to the encounter view, it is possible that the Bible contains some historical errors. The recorded history in Scripture may be inaccurate at a number of points. But this is not really important. For example, from this perspective, whether or not Jesus Christ actually rose from the dead in time and space is not relevant. The important thing is the divine encounter with God that is possible when one reads about the risen Christ.

A Special Encounter With God Is Needed

Therefore, what is needed is this special encounter with God. Only then can a person experience what God intended for them. The written Word, apart from this encounter, is without real meaning or substance.

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Response To The Encounter View

There are a number of major problems with the “encounter view” of Scripture. We can summarize them as follows.

1. With This View There Is No Ultimate Authority In Scripture

This type of Bible has no ultimate standard of authority. Divine revelation, instead of being something objective, is reduced to a personal experience or encounter with God through Jesus Christ.

However, the Apostle Paul made it clear that his actual writings were the Word of God—Scripture did not merely become the Word of God when someone encountered it. He wrote to the Thessalonians:

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NKJV).

Scripture is God’s authoritative Word. It is the starting point of all discussions of Christian doctrine. It is often written in forms of propositions or statements of truths. It does not merely become true

when someone reads it or has it read to them. When one accepts the encounter view of Scripture and rejects the orthodox view, then it is only a matter of time when other central beliefs are abandoned. Thus, the encounter view, when logically followed, can actually lead a person to unbelief in Jesus.

2. This Is Not Jesus’ View Of Scripture

Those who hold the encounter view claim to accept the authority of Jesus Christ rather than the authority of Scripture. However, in doing so, they actually reject the authority of Jesus who held a high view of Scripture. He said the following about Old Testament Scripture:

Don’t suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning. Heaven and earth may disappear. But I promise you that not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen (Matthew 5:17,18 CEV).

Jesus assumed the Scripture was true in its written form. He never made the distinction between what is written and what is encountered in the written word. Consequently, the encounter view is not Jesus’ view.

3. We Only Know About Christ Through The Written Word

While all believers should desire to make Christ central in their lives, there must be some way of knowing who He is and what He actually said.

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Without an accurate record of His words and deeds we cannot be certain that we know His exact identity or what He wants from us.

What is necessary is an authoritative and accurate revelation from God. This revelation must be in a permanent written form. This written word should be our only standard of authority.

Thus, a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ comes from reading, or hearing, His Word read, and then acting upon what was said.

Summary To Question 16

What Is The Encounter View Of The Bible's Authority? (Barthian, Neoorthodox)

The encounter view of divine inspiration (also known as Barthian or Neoorthodox view) basically treats the Bible as other books. It argues that the Bible has no authority in and of itself. Scripture contains myths, legends, and historical inaccuracies.

The unique feature of the Bible is its ability to testify to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Individuals, as well as entire churches, may encounter the living God through the Bible when Scripture is read. Thus, the Bible becomes revelation at the time anyone is reading it but it is not to be considered a record of divine revelation. Consequently, the divine inspiration of the Bible is an ongoing process. God continues to reveal His truth to all of those who read the Bible.

There are many problems with this perspective. For one thing, it rejects the biblical idea that Scripture is the record of God's divine revelation. However, this is the view which the written word has of itself. The Bible is the record of God acting and speaking to humanity.

This view also finds errors in Scripture—something the Bible does not promote. Historical truth is important from a biblical perspective since it records God acting in history. Scripture teaches that people encounter Jesus Christ through reading the Bible because it is God's objective and authoritative Word. The encounter view removes all the authority from Scripture.

Indeed, the encounter view is not Jesus' view of Scripture. He made no distinction between the words of Scripture and what is encountered when these words are read. To Jesus, the words of Scripture, as they stand, are the words of God. This is true whether or not someone has an encounter with these words.

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Question 17

What Is The Mythological View Of The Bible's Authority?

The “mythological view” of the authority of Holy Scripture is similar to the “encounter view.” It believes that a person can encounter God through the Scripture. However, the mythological view does not believe that the supernatural events that the Scripture records actually occurred.

Claim: The Bible Contains Mythological Stories

The mythological view basically says that the supernatural events that are recorded in the New Testament never occurred – they are myths. The job of the interpreter is to strip away the mythology to discover who Jesus really was, and what He really said. Once this is done, then the person can have an encounter with God.

Response To The Mythological View

We can respond to this view in a number of ways. They are as follows.

1. Why Study A Mythological Bible?

The problem one immediately has with the mythological view of divine inspiration concerns the purpose for studying the Bible. Why should the Bible be taken seriously if it is nothing but a group of myths? Why should anyone waste his or her time studying something that claims to be the Word of God but, in reality, is nothing but fiction?

Furthermore, if the Bible contains a bunch of myths, then why should anyone believe in the God of the Bible? On what basis can we contend that He really exists—especially if the Bible is nothing but a fanciful book? Preaching that the Bible is nothing but myths is a quick way to empty the churches.

2. Why Would God Reveal Himself In Such A Way?

In addition, why would God, if does He exist, reveal Himself in such a way? It does not make sense that a God who created the universe with such precision and order would reveal Himself in a hopelessly contradictory and mythical book. Consequently, the mythological view does not encourage any real study of Scripture or give any real basis of trust in the God of the Bible.

3. The Writers Of Scripture Denied They Were Following Myths

The writers of Scripture personally testified that they were not following myths when they related the events in the life of the Lord Jesus. Peter wrote:

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When we told you about the power and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not telling clever stories that someone had made up. But with our own eyes we saw his true greatness. God, our great and wonderful Father, truly honored him by saying, “This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him.” We were there with Jesus on the holy mountain and heard this voice speak from heaven (2 Peter 1:16-18 CEV).

Bible-believing Christians are not lovers of myths or superstition. We do not wish to be deceived. Therefore, we welcome an honest and open investigation of the Scriptures. We are not afraid of the truth because we follow the One who said that He is the truth. Mythology and superstition have no place in Christianity.

Summary To Question 17

What Is The Mythological View Of The Bible’s Authority?

In some circles it is popular to see the Bible as nothing but a bunch of myths. Consequently, it is contended that these myths need to be stripped away from the Bible before one can experience God.

Yet the mythological view does not take the claims of the Bible seriously. It assumes that it is like any other book - with the exception that God can somehow be experienced through this book of fables.

The mythological view certainly does not encourage any faith in the God of the Scriptures. If the Bible is mythical, then why should anyone believe anything that it says? The mythical view is not the correct view of the Bible. Nowhere do we find the writers of Scripture promoting myths.

Indeed, we find that the writers of Scripture emphatically denying that they were spreading myths or fables. They were relating what they saw and what they heard. They knew the difference between myths and reality and they were insistent in saying that they were telling the truth. Thus, the mythological idea of the Bible does not fit what the Bible says about itself.

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Question 18

What Conclusions Can We Make About The Bible's Divine Inspiration And Authority?

Having looked at what the Bible says about the subject of divine inspiration, as well as some of the inadequate theories that have been proposed, we can make the following conclusions about the authority of the Bible.

1. The Bible Is Both A Divine And Human Book

The Bible is not merely a human book, but rather a divine book written by human authors. These authors were supernaturally guided by God to record His truth to humanity. The words of Scripture were the words of the human authors, but the truth they recorded is God's Word to us. Therefore, we have the Word of God given to humanity in the words of humans.

2. The Bible Is A Unique Book

The Bible is unique—it is different from all other books, having no like or equal. No book is even close by comparison. Scripture, therefore, should never be compared to other human writings that show spiritual insight and wisdom. The Bible is not merely an insightful book—it is the Word of God.

3. The Process Of Writing Scripture Was Living, Not Mechanical

Divine inspiration occurred using the writer's personality and vocabulary. The writers were not merely passive stenographers recording what was dictated to them by God. Exactly how this process occurred is a mystery that God does not explain.

However, what we do know is that the end result, the written word of God, is completely trustworthy and error-free.

4. Scripture Is Fully Authoritative, Not Partially Authoritative

We should also emphasize that divine inspiration covers every part of the Bible. There are not some parts that are more divinely inspired than others. Neither are there divinely uninspired parts of Scripture. The Bible does not contain the Word of God—it *is* the Word of God.

If someone argued the Bible merely contains God's Word, then it would cause uncertainty to everyone. Who determines what is divinely inspired and what is not? How could anyone be confident the portion they were reading was actually the divinely inspired part? Scripture is clear. The Bible is, in all parts, divinely inspired.

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5. **God's Authority Concerns The Wording Of Scripture, Not Merely The Concepts**

It is not merely the concepts that are found in the Bible which are divinely inspired, but the very way in which the actual words are used to relay the concepts, is also divinely inspired. Thoughts are expressed in words. Words make up sentences. It is the way these words were used in the phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that are divinely inspired.

6. **The Writing Of Scripture Was Unique – It Is Not The Same Thing As Illumination**

Scripture makes the distinction between the God of the Bible filling a person with His Holy Spirit to supernaturally write divinely authoritative Scripture, and illumination, the ability to understand the things that are already written.

Summary To Question 18 What Conclusions Can We Make About The Bible's Inspiration And Authority?

The Bible is a book that is both divine and human. It is God's revelation to humanity written by human beings who were led by the Spirit of God. Scripture is unique in the fact that it is the only divine revelation that humanity has been given.

The Bible is on a different level than every other book - it has no equal. The divine inspiration of Scripture occurred by God using the authors' own personality and vocabulary. There is no idea of the entire Scripture being the result of some sort of divine dictation. In addition, divine inspiration is complete—covering all parts of Scripture. Finally, divine inspiration concerns the very words used by the writers, as well as the concepts they recorded.

The Bible has both infallible truth and divine authority in everything that it teaches. The Bible is also the product of human beings. It has all the evidences of human authorship as clearly as any other book that was ever written. This human/divine authorship extends to every part of Scripture. It is the Word of God in the words of human beings.

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