

## **The Book of Acts (#4); The Church's First Prayer Meeting**

The last time we were in Acts 1 we read of the ascension of our Lord Jesus into heaven, where He took His seat at the right hand of God the Father as king over the promised kingdom of God. This was the realization of God's promise to King David that one of His descendants would reign over an everlasting kingdom. God had promised David regarding his future son: "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:13).

As our Lord departed from His apostles, two angels assured His disciples that He would return one day in the same manner that He left them; that is, Jesus Christ would come again in glory at the end of this age, at the end of this world. Of course we know that Christ will then execute judgment on the entire human race, separating all humanity into two groups, as a shepherd at the end of the day divides his flock, separating his sheep from his goats. He will declare to His people who are pardoned and exonerated on Judgment Day, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

For forty days after His resurrection the Lord Jesus had taught His disciples, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." But then before leaving them, Jesus "commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me...'" Apparently He had taught them about the coming of the Spirit in His post resurrection instruction to them. The Lord assured them that when the promise of the Father came upon them, they would receive power and become His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Holy Spirit would empower them with courage, boldness, wisdom, and spiritual authority that would impact the ones to whom they bore witness of Jesus the Lord.

After the Lord's ascension, we then read of the gathered disciples as they waited for the day of Pentecost. Here is Acts 1:12-14:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. <sup>13</sup>And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup>These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Although there are not many verses before us, there are several matters stated and others that may be addressed in the light of these words. We will first consider the contents of the passage itself. Under this heading we read of the return of the apostles to Jerusalem (v. 12). Then we will reflect on the extended prayer meeting they held as they waited for the Day of Pentecost (vs. 13-14a). And thirdly, we will consider the others who waited with the apostles for Pentecost (v. 14b). After addressing the contents of the passage, we will then assert some important principles and lessons that we may glean from this passage.

### **I. The contents of the passage (1:12-14)**

#### **A. The return of the apostles to Jerusalem (v. 12)**

After our Lord ascended into heaven we read in **verse 12** these words, "***Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.***" Our Lord had ascended into heaven while they were on the Mount of Olives.

Olivet was known from ancient times, having been named for the many olive trees that covered its slopes. The view from this mount encompassed in full view the ancient city of Jerusalem, particularly the

temple mount and Herod's temple. It was commonly believed that when the Messiah arrived at Jerusalem, He would come from the Mount of Olives and enter the temple courts on the eastern side of the city through the Golden Gate, sometimes called the Gate of Mercy. Jesus and His disciples had probably walked through this gate when they went to Mount Olivet with Jesus, and after He ascended, they probably reentered Jerusalem through this same gate. The gate has been sealed since 1541. Because the Jews believed that when the Messiah arrived the resurrection of the dead would occur and the righteous would proceed with the promised king into the city, many Jews desired to be buried on the slopes between the Mount and the city wall. Standing on Olivet today, you see myriads of crypts and tombstones, approximately 150,000 total graves.

Luke described the distance of Olivet from the old city of Jerusalem to be "a sabbath day's journey." This was the distance that the Jewish rabbis had held and taught to be permissible on the Sabbath. Traveling any farther would have been deemed "work", which would be a transgression of the Sabbath Day. The distance was about 1 kilometer, or 2/3 of a mile.<sup>1</sup> This word by Luke simply sets forth the distance they traveled; it does not suggest that this was a sabbath day when they returned to Jerusalem. Jesus' ascension took place on Thursday of this week, which was the fortieth day after the day of Christ's resurrection.

This reference to the distance being a "sabbath day's journey" may help us be mindful of the Jewish culture and context to which these early disciples of Jesus were familiar, which they practiced and observed. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea continued to be observant Jews according to the Mosaic law. This continued until the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. These Jewish Christians would have much to reassess and much to readjust in their thinking and practice as they bore witness to Christ in the regions beyond their homeland.

Some see verse 12 to be the end of the introduction of Luke to the Acts. Verse 12 concludes the account of Jesus. From this point onward, the story focuses upon the apostles and disciples of Jesus and their mission to the world.

## **B. The extended prayer meeting they held as they waited for the Day of Pentecost (vs. 13-14a).**

We read that the apostles returned to Jerusalem and there wait until the Day of Pentecost. **Verses 13 through 14a** read,

*And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup>These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication...*

The upper room was where the Lord and His disciples had observed the Lord's Supper the night that He was arrested and tried. Here we read that they were continuing to stay in the upper room. Upper rooms were commonly large areas in which assemblies would gather for study and prayer. It was also quite common for them to be rented as dwelling places.<sup>2</sup>

Such upper rooms were quite common. Sometimes they were merely booths that were erected on the flat roof of the stone building. The author (Lenski himself) saw many of them in the Holy Land... The body of Dorcas was laid out in one of them. Sometimes they were roomy and even ornate like the one with its tiled floor that is mentioned in Luke 22:12. They were used as places for retirement and quiet and, for the company here described, as a place that was free from interruption and disturbance.<sup>3</sup>

Luke identified the apostles by name. He had done so in His Gospel on the occasion of Jesus first calling them to their apostolic office. We read in Luke 6:12-16 these words:

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<sup>1</sup> This distance in Hebrew standard of the day was 2,000 cubits.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Haenchen, **The Acts of the Apostles; A Commentary** (The Westminster Press, 1971), 153.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Lenski, **The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles** (Augsburg Press, 1961),

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup>And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: <sup>14</sup>Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; <sup>15</sup>Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; <sup>16</sup>Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

They are the same names here in Acts 1:13, but the order of the names differs somewhat. In this list “James” is listed second to Peter. Perhaps when Luke wrote this book to Theophilus that this James had already been martyred in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 12:2). Of course Judas Iscariot is not listed. And so there were now but 11 apostles. But we will consider next time their selection of a man to fill out their number to twelve apostles once again. The last apostle mentioned by Luke is Judas the son of James, who is named Thaddeus in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18.

The Lord Jesus had called and appointed these twelve apostles to become the spiritual shepherds or leaders of the people of God, that is, “the twelve tribes of the house of Israel.” We read of our Lord’s intention to confer this authority to them in Matthew 19:28, in which we read,

So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

There are differing interpretations as to when our Lord was referring to as “in the regeneration.” Some say He was speaking of His second coming at the resurrection of the dead. Others argue that this “regeneration” is referring to Jesus’ own resurrection and ascension to His glorious throne. This would mean that even now the twelve apostles are judging, or spiritually ruling over spiritual Israel, the elect of God. This view would be consistent with the teaching of Jesus to the corrupt Jewish leaders that we quoted recently. Jesus had said to them through the parable of the wicked vinedressers, “

<sup>40</sup>“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”

<sup>41</sup>They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone.  
This was the Lord’s doing,  
And it is marvelous in our eyes’?

<sup>43</sup>“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. <sup>44</sup>And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” (Matt. 21:40-44)

Jesus removed the authority of the Jewish leaders from their leadership positions over Israel and He replaced them with His twelve apostles. [We will speak more about this when we address the apostles’ replacement for Judas in our next passage of Acts 1.]

We read that “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.” The apostolic band did not sit about in an idle manner. They spent their time praying. Of verse 13 Simon Kistemaker wrote,

In the first part of this verse, Luke mentions two noteworthy items. First, the apostles are continually in prayer. This is a fundamental characteristic of the apostles and of the early Christians. After Pentecost, the believers come together for prayer (2:42) and the apostles make it known that their task is to “devote [themselves] to prayer and the ministry of the word” (6:4). And in their writings they urge the believers

to “pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17). Next, the apostles pray together “with one mind” (NASV). They present their prayers unanimously and express a perfect unity that becomes a feature of the early church. Presumably the apostles pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whose coming Jesus promises repeatedly during His ministry.<sup>4</sup>

We could speculate somewhat as to other matters for which they prayed. There was probably a great deal of humble confession of these disciples before the Lord. All of them had played the coward upon the arrest of our Lord, having fled from the danger of the Romans. I can imagine there was confession of their unbelief for having failed to understand and believe all that had been taught them in advance by our Lord of His suffering and death. Also, I imagine that there were apologies expressed for having doubted the testimony of the resurrection of the women and the slowness to believe all that had transpired. They were probably praying for their Jewish brethren for having crucified their promised King and having persisted in their unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ. . These were a humble, but grateful group of men, who were probably still fearful and apprehensive of the dangerous conditions about them. But perhaps most of all, they were praying for themselves with view to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that would soon be upon them and of the regional and world-wide mission that was before them.

### C. The others who waited with the apostles for Pentecost (v. 14b)

The apostles were not alone as they waited for Pentecost to arrive. We read they were praying, but that there were others with them. We read in **verse 14**, “*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*” Here Luke mentions “the women” in general. Luke gave emphasis through His Gospel and this book of Acts on the presence and role of women during the ministry of Jesus on earth and in the history of the first century church. These women were no doubt the same women who had traveled about with Jesus supporting Him and His disciples financially from their own resources. They are mentioned in Luke 8:1ff:

Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve *were* with Him, <sup>2</sup>and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities-- Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.

But we read that the mother of Jesus and His brothers were also among the disciples waiting and praying with regard to the Day of Pentecost. Mary and Jesus’ brothers are not set forth as stellar believers and supporters of Jesus during His earthly ministry. They were of the opinion that He was “touched”, that is, mentally deranged. After Jesus had initially chosen who would be His apostles, and though He had become immensely popular, we read that His own family rejected Him.

Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. <sup>21</sup>But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind. (Mark 3:20f)

John recorded of Jesus’ brothers in His Gospel, “For even His brothers did not believe in Him” (John 7:5). But here in Acts 1:14 we read that both His mother, Mary, and His brothers, were with the disciples waiting and praying. Apparently the resurrection of Jesus Christ brought them out of their unbelief and they, too, became disciples of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, **Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles**; New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1990), 59.

Luke does not name Jesus' brothers, but among them included James and Jude. Each of these two men would later write an inspired epistle included in our New Testament. The James mentioned as one of the eleven apostles, was the first of the apostles to be martyred. We read about this in Acts 12:

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. <sup>2</sup>Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. <sup>3</sup>And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. (Acts 12:1f)

Sometime in those first years of the Christian era, James, the brother of our Lord, became the leading elder in the church at Jerusalem. We will read about him later in the book of Acts.

Now the Greek word describing the siblings of our Lord is ἀδελφοίς (*adelphois*). They were our Lord's brothers, that is, half-brothers. It is most likely that Joseph the husband of Mary was their father, but he was, of course, not the natural father of Jesus, God being His Father from eternity. We read about Joseph and Mary's marital relationship in Matthew's infancy narrative. When Joseph and Mary were betrothed to be married, Joseph learned that she was with child. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, informing him of Mary's virginal birth of Jesus. The angel instructed Joseph on how to act and react to this event. We read in Matthew 1:24 and 25 these words, "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **but knew her not until she had given birth to a son**. And he called his name Jesus." After Jesus was born and Mary recovered from giving birth, Joseph and Mary had normal marital relations, giving birth to Jesus' half brothers and sisters. We read the fullest description of our Lord's family in Matthew 13:53ff.

Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. <sup>54</sup>When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup>Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His **mother** called Mary? And **His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas**? <sup>56</sup>And **His sisters**, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" <sup>57</sup>So they were offended at Him.

## II. The implications of our passage in understanding several important biblical doctrines.

The reference to Mary, the mother of Jesus, here in Acts 1:14, calls for our comments and response to the Roman Catholic teaching and practice regarding Mary. Now these comments are not intended to demean or shame Roman Catholics, but to make them aware of damnable doctrines of which they are being taught, from which they must repent.

Roman Catholicism teaches promotes Mariology. What is Mariology? Technically, it is the theological study of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Although Roman Catholicism is the most vocal promoter of Mariology, other denominations do as well, including the Eastern Orthodox denomination, high church Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and many others.

It is commonly asserted that there are four doctrinal dogmas in the promotion of Mary in these denominations. These include Mary's (1) **divine motherhood**, (2) her **immaculate conception**, (3) her **perpetual virginity**, (4) and her **assumption** into heaven upon her death of both her body and soul.

Mary's **divine motherhood** is the assertion that Mary is "the mother of God". Because Jesus is truly man and truly God, because Mary gave birth to Him, she is therefore to be regarded and called the Mother of God. This was first affirmed in the Church Council at Ephesus in 431 AD. This council conferred the title to Mary as **Theotokos**, mother of God. Protestants, of course, have generally rejected this title and its teaching, for it inevitably leads to the veneration (i.e. worship) of Mary, which is idolatry. Mary is viewed as an intercessor, who may secure answered prayer from her Son on behalf of those who venerate her. She may be prayed to, worshipped, in whom you place your faith that she cares and will supply your every need.

The teaching of Mary's **immaculate conception** is an assertion that when Mary was born, she came into this world without the guilt or the effects of original sin. It is reasoned, how could she give birth to the sinless Son of God unless she herself was free from sin?

Mary's *perpetual virginity* is asserted by those who venerate her. The clear teaching of the Bible regarding Jesus' brothers and sister is reinterpreted to be either sons and daughters of Joseph from a previous marriage, or they are actually references to His cousins. Rome teaches that Mary remained a virgin through her entire life, a teaching which originated in the early Christian centuries when virginity was regarded as the highest and purest way of life that could be lived.

The *assumption of Mary* asserts that at the end of Mary's life on earth, both her body and soul were translated into heaven. Some hold that she never experienced death, but that she was translated into heaven apart from death. Rome regards Mary as having been crowned the Queen of heaven by her Son, Jesus Christ. Rome has observed annual feast days to commemorate these events and teachings. [They are listed on the back page of these notes.]

We assert that the exaltation and veneration (actually worship) of Mary is extreme idolatry. Roman Catholicism would have its people believe that Mary has divine attributes. They claim that she is omniscient, that is, all-knowing, for she knows, sympathizes, and hears all those who believe in her and pray to her wherever they may be in the world. They assign Mary the divine attribute of omnipotence—she has all power—for she has the authority to answer prayer. And she is worshipped, for they are taught to pray and venerate her; consider the Rosary, which instructs people to pray and venerate Mary. She is even claimed and promoted in recent years to be a Co-redemptrix, a savior alongside her Son. Rome has made Mary to be a goddess. This is idolatry and blasphemy.

We might ask the question where in the Holy Scriptures are these doctrines regarding Mary to be found? And of course, they are not taught in the Word of God. In fact, the reference to Mary in the text of Acts 1:14 is the last direct mention of Mary in the New Testament. The Scriptures are void of any teaching that has been asserted or promoted regarding Mary through church history. Here in Acts 1:14 Luke presents her as being numbered among the other disciples waiting and praying with view to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The teaching and veneration (worship) of Mary that is promoted is not to be found in Holy Scripture. That Roman Catholicism and other denominations accept and teach this doctrine reveals the failure to hold to a foundational doctrine in understanding the nature and ways of God.

There are two ways in which the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God can be set aside or denied. First, the teaching of the Bible can be denied, that is, there are those who neglect or deny the teaching of the Bible; they take away from the Word of God. Second, the teaching of the Bible can be set aside by additional teaching from outside the Bible that is viewed as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. This second deadly danger is what characterizes those who exalt Mary based on unbiblical teaching. Now we affirm that Roman Catholicism is not wholly errant, in that they espouse biblical teaching in some important matters, such as their commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity. The problem is what they claim in addition to biblical teaching that people are to believe and how they are to live before God. They are as the ancient Samaritans, who dwelling in the land had added to their belief and practice before the God of Israel, the teaching and practice of Baal worship. "They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33).

There are warnings in the Word of God regarding the error of adding to the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 4:2 we read God's warning, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." Proverbs 30:6 declares, "Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." And then the sharply worded warning in the last chapter of the Bible reads this way:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Rev. 22:18, 19)

The error of Rome can be attributed to their failure to hold to a principle teaching that the Protestants championed that resulted eventually in the Protestant Reformation. The Word of God itself teaches the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, which means *Scripture alone*. The written Word of God--the Bible--is the full and final source of all authoritative information of what we are to believe about God and from which we are

to learn how to live before God. It is the denial of *Sola Scriptura*, which has resulted in the great error of idolatry of Mary, or Mariolatry, as Protestants sometimes call it. We believe that the Bible itself teaches that Christian doctrine is to be based solely on the written Word of God alone.

Rome declares that there are two equal sources of authority that teach what we are to believe and how we are to live before God. These are the Holy Scriptures—the Bible, but in addition, Tradition, that is, the official teaching of the established church through the ages.

But our Lord Jesus repudiated Tradition as a viable, authoritative source of divine instruction. Mark's Gospel records an occasion when the Lord Jesus confronted the Jewish religious authorities about the authority of the Bible, the written, authoritative, Word of God. They had set aside the Scriptures, not believing the Bible to be the sole authority to determine what we are to believe and how we are to live before God.

Let us consider **Mark 7:1-13**. Here we read that the Lord Jesus corrected the Jewish leaders for having usurped the authority of the Scripture with their tradition.

First, consider *the setting*. The Lord and His disciples were eating with the Pharisees and their scribes. A problem arose between the two groups. As the Old Testament prophet Amos asked the rhetorical question, so we might ask, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). There was a fundamental difference between these two groups respecting the authority that governed their faith and practice, that is what they believed and how they lived. Inevitably an issue surfaced that caused a conflict. Mark 7:1 and 2 read,

Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him (Jesus), having come from Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.

What was the underlying problem? These religious leaders adopted an authority in addition to the Bible to determine the will of God. They believed that their (written) Oral Tradition had equal authority to the Holy Scriptures. But in practice, their Tradition usurped the authority of Scripture (Mark 7:3-5). Mark described their convictions:

<sup>3</sup>For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. <sup>4</sup>When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

<sup>5</sup>Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

The Pharisees and Scribes would claim to hold to the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament), as did the Lord Jesus and His disciples. The problem arose, however, because the Pharisees and their scribes held an additional authority that the Lord Jesus did not recognize as valid or binding. They believed that the historic tradition of the rabbis was as binding as Scripture. These two groups were governed by different authorities and this resulted in a problem arising when they came together.

I would assert that there cannot be true fellowship and cooperation in matters of faith and practice unless there is a common agreement that the Scriptures will govern the nature of that fellowship and cooperation. Unless this is agreed upon, in time, sooner or later, the group that has an authority not bound by the Scriptures will impose beliefs or practice upon them who restrict themselves to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice. The result will be that the ones who hold to the Bible alone will be compelled to either object or withdraw, resulting in them being viewed as schismatic or disruptive to "cooperation."

We next read of *the conflict* that ensued. The Lord corrected the Pharisees and the Scribes respecting their authority (Mark 7:6-7)

<sup>6</sup>He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

‘This people honors Me with their lips,  
But their heart is far from Me.  
<sup>7</sup>And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

Notice His directness and His charge (Mark 7:7, 8).

***<sup>7</sup>And in vain they worship Me,  
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’***

The Lord Jesus taught that the Scriptures were the Words of God to His people that were to be believed and obeyed. The traditions were inventions of men that had no authority. They were hypocrites because they showed forth the pretense of walking before God when in actuality their faith and practice were governed not by God but by man’s opinions.

But the fact is that we may have this tendency to set aside Scripture, when another authority is embraced. We read in Mark 7:9-13 these words:

<sup>9</sup>He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. <sup>10</sup>“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ <sup>11</sup>But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”’—(that is, a gift to God), <sup>12</sup>then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, <sup>13</sup>making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

The Lord turned and addressed the crowds on the authority of Scripture. The Lord instructed the crowds illustrating the error of elevating tradition over Scripture.

When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: <sup>15</sup>There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. <sup>16</sup>If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Mark 7:14-16)

It is essential for pastors, if they are to lead the Lord’s people rightly, to be committed to the sole authority of Holy Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice. The full and final authority of Scripture alone should be regarded as authoritative for the people of God over all of the teachings and traditions of men. A church, if it is to be a legitimate church, and every Christian, should hold to the sole authority of the Scriptures in matters of faith and practice. It is a watershed issue. Although some may deviate somewhat from this principle and still be genuine Christians, serious problems will result if this principle is not maintained.

Adding to the Holy Scriptures another source for divine truth is damnable. The authority and the sufficiency of Scripture was one of the principle issues of the Protestant Reformation, which began in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Once people accepted the Bible alone as the sole authority to determine the will of God in matters of faith in practice, it set them on a course that changed history. God blessed these people greatly as long as the held to this principle, seeking to order their lives according to its precepts.

Of course the early Protestants were protesting the teaching and practice of Roman Catholicism. The Reformers understood that Rome had set aside the sole authority of Scripture, negating its teachings due to their concept of tradition, that they claim has equal authority to Scripture. The Protestants said, “No.” We will look to the Scriptures alone as the infallible guide to instruct us in what we are to believe and as to how we should live.” *Sola scriptura* was their cry: “Scripture alone” would govern what they believed about God and how they would live before God.

The belief and practice of Roman Catholicism closely parallels what we discussed above. Just as the Jewish Pharisees and their scribes had added their tradition to the Holy Scriptures as the source of the Word



of God, so Roman Catholicism promotes the same glaring error. That denomination is guilty of what our Lord condemned in those Pharisees and their scribes. Rome renders the written Word of God as secondary, and even set aside in order to maintain their tradition. This is because they believe and teach that the church, the Magisterium alone, has the authority to interpret the Bible. It is foundational to a sound biblical ministry that the Holy Bible alone is affirmed to be the sole source for the will of God in all matters of faith and practice.

The sole authority of the Holy Scriptures to determine Christian faith and practice—*Sola Scriptura*—has been termed *the formal principle* of the Reformation. This is what ultimately led to and resulted in the Protestant Reformation—the belief in *Sola Scriptura* -- Scripture alone.

When we say that we hold to *Sola Scriptura*, we are asserting that the Bible is the only inspired and authoritative word of God and as such, it is the only source for Christian doctrine. We also assert by the expression, *Sola Scriptura*, that the Bible is understandable and self-interpreting. We believe in the perspicuity of the Scriptures, that anyone can understand the Scriptures, if they are read prayerfully, carefully, and the Holy Spirit blesses the effort. Our statement of faith asserts this truth in this way:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them. (The Baptist Confession of 1689, Art. 1, par. 7).

Again, the Roman Catholic position is that the church (i.e. Rome) is the custodian of God's revelation. The church alone, in other words the leaders of the church alone, have the authority to interpret the Bible for the people. Here are the words of the Roman Catholic Vatican II document *Dei Verbum* (1965):

Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. Sacred Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scripture alone. Hence both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence... Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit, which is entrusted to the Church... But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone... Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it.... It is clear, therefore, that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others...

Rome has always criticized Protestants by saying that this belief in *Sola Scriptura* is a dangerous invitation to individualism. They see the problem as though Protestants were saying, "Reject the authority of the Church. Away with its creeds. It's just me and my Bible." But this is not what the Reformers believed or taught. They balanced themselves between Rome, which claimed to have the exclusive authority to interpret Scripture rightly, and some of the Anabaptist radicals, who did not think they needed the Bible at all, because the Holy Spirit communicated directly to them, or so they thought. The Reformers insisted that the Bible was the source and final authority in determining information about God, how we might know Him, and how He would have us live. The Reformers believed in the need for teachers in the church to help give understanding of the Word of God. But they asserted that the whole church, including the laity, had the responsibility and the ability to read and interpret the Bible. The Reformers soon developed confessions of faith that the churches received and endorsed as their official statements of what they believed the Bible taught.

Now, just as Rome, the Eastern Orthodox, as well as certain radicals rejected the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, we have similar problems today in evangelicalism. There are some who simply go to church and

listen and accept what the preacher says, regardless of whether or not it is truly biblical. Their biblical knowledge is appalling. In effect they have made their pastors little popes, or “magisterium,” accepting their word as authoritative rather than the Scriptures alone. One described it in this way:

Today, this same process of “dumbing down” has meant that we are, in George Gallup's words, “a nation of biblical illiterates.” Perhaps we have a high view of the Bible’s inspiration: 80% of adult Americans believe that the Bible is the literal or inspired Word of God. But 30% of the teenagers who attend church regularly do not even know why Easter is celebrated. “The decline in Bible reading,” says the pollster Gallup, “is due in part to the widely held conviction that the Bible is inaccessible, and to less emphasis on religious training in the churches.” Just as Rome's infallibility rested on the belief that the Bible itself was difficult, obscure, and confusing, so today people want the “net breakdown” from the professionals: what does it mean for me and how will it help me and make me happy? But those who read the Bible for more than devotional meditations know how clear it is--at least on the main points it addresses--and how it ends up making religion less confusing and obscure. Again today, the Bible--especially in mainline Protestant churches--is a mysterious book that can only be understood by a small cadre of biblical scholars who are “in the know.” (Michael Horton)

We see that this principle of *Sola Scriptura* was at the very heart of the Reformation. Scripture alone and one’s own understanding of Scripture alone was what shaped and governed the beliefs and practice of the Reformers. It does the same for our church. If it cannot be shown in the Scriptures, we refuse to believe it. If it can be shown in the Scriptures, we are bound to embrace it. We affirm *Sola Scriptura*.

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## **Annual Feast Days of devotion to Mary in Roman Catholicism**

Rome has observed annual feast days to commemorate its doctrines respecting Mary.

**January 1 – Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God** -- On this feast day, we honor the Blessed Mother as the Mother of Jesus Christ. It is celebrated on the 8th day of Christmastide, which falls on the 1st of January. This day is also a holy day of obligation.

**February 11 – Our Lady of Lourdes** -- During this day, the Catholic Church celebrates and commemorates the apparition of Our Blessed Mother to Saint Bernadette Soubirous at the town of Lourdes in southwestern France. Our Lady of Lourdes appeared 18 times from February 11, 1858, until July 16.

**March 25 – Annunciation** - The feast of the Annunciation celebrates Angel Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mary that God chose her to be the mother of His only son.

**May 13 – Our Lady of Fatima** - On this day, the Church celebrates the anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady in 1917 at Fatima, Portugal. She appeared to Lucia, who was 9 years old, and her cousins Franco, who was 8, and Jacinta, who was 6 between May 13, 1917, and October 1917.

**July 16 – Our Lady of Mount Carmel** - This day commemorates the apparition of Our Lady to St. Simon Stock, an English Carmelite monk. Our Lady was holding the Child Jesus in one arm and the Brown Scapular in the other during her appearance. The Scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel or the Brown Scapular is a popular devotion as when Our Lady gave the Brown Scapular to Sr. Simon Stock, it came with a promise that whoever dies wearing it shall never suffer eternal fire.

**August 15 – Assumption** - The feast of the Assumption of Our Lady marks the period of The Blessed Mother's ascent to heaven. For some areas, this feast day is a holy day of obligation.

**August 22 – Queenship of Mary** - Eight days after the celebration of the Assumption, the Catholic Church honors the Queenship of the Blessed Mother. This is considered an extension or prolongation of the celebration of the Assumption.

**September 8 – Birth of Mary** - The Catholic Church celebrates the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**October 7 – Our Lady of the Rosary** - In the Catholic Church, October is the month of the Holy Rosary. Hence it celebrates its yearly feast on October 7. Previously this feast was known as the feast of "Our Lady of Victory," which honors the naval victory of Europe against Turkish invasion in the 16th century.

**December 8 – Immaculate Conception** - This feast honors the Blessed Mother and the Immaculate Conception's Solemnity, celebrating Our Blessed Mother's conception without sin. This day is considered a Holy Day of Obligation

**December 12 – Our Lady of Guadalupe** - This day commemorates the apparition of Our Lady to the Mexican peasant Juan Diego in 1531. This feast is important and widely celebrated in Mexico.

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