

Divine Revelation and Sola Scriptura

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All inside the dome at the very center of St Peter's Basilica in Rome, we find these words spoken by Jesus to His Apostle Peter, almost 2000 years ago. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Catholics see in these sacred words a special authority that Jesus gave to Peter to serve the church in its mission, to faithfully pass on all that Jesus revealed. And Catholics believe that Jesus wanted that authority handed on throughout the centuries to Peter's successors, the popes, so that future generations of Christians might come to know with confidence God's plan of salvation. But do we really need an authoritative teacher and guide to show us the way to God? Can't we just be spiritual and find our own path to God? Or perhaps we could just go to the Bible and discover from the scriptures all that we need to know for life? These are some of the questions we will explore as we consider the topic of how God communicates himself to us, otherwise known as divine revelation. You I imagine if you were one of the 12 Apostles there that day when Jesus said to Peter, I give you the keys of the kingdom. What would those words have meant to you? For a first century Jew, the image of the keys would have been charged with great symbolism. In the ancient Jewish tradition, the King had a right hand man, a prime minister or master of the palace, who was in charge of the day to day affairs of His Kingdom. In the book of Isaiah, chapter 22 the symbol for the Prime Minister's authority was the keys of the kingdom. So when Jesus announces the kingdom and then says to Peter, I give you the keys of the kingdom, he is saying a lot. He's establishing Peter as his principal leader, like the Prime Minister, the one who would be in charge of the affairs of his kingdom. And this Prime Minister, like role was passed on to Peter's successors, the Popes throughout the centuries. One of the chief responsibilities of Peter and his successors is to guard and proclaim all that God has revealed. Now let's step back and let's take a look at this wider topic of divine revelation, the idea that God loves us so much that he seeks us out and communicates himself to us so that we could know him personally and know his plan for our lives. You

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What is divine revelation? God reveals Himself to man over a long period throughout the Old Testament, but the fullness of God's revelation of Himself comes in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. So Jesus is the fullness of God's revelation of Himself to us. Now, how is this revelation handed on from generation to generation? Well, the fullness of God's revelation is what we call the deposit of faith. And the apostles hand the deposit of faith on to their successors, the bishops.

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Did Jesus come and just hand out a bunch of Bibles? No, he came and he founded a church, St Paul in Second Thessalonians 2:15 says to stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, either by word of mouth or by letter. So we can see clearly here in Scripture that we're being told to embrace both scripture and tradition, written and oral teaching both as riches that help us encounter the

mysteries of Christ, these oral teachings were handed down and entrusted to the church so that we as Catholics can say that we really have the whole word of God as our sole rule of faith.

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Now this deposit of faith is composed of two elements, what we call sacred tradition, that which is handed on orally, and Sacred Scripture, which is the part of sacred tradition that is committed to writing in a permanent way. And this whole deposit of faith, composed of Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition, is handed on by the bishops from generation to generation. And the bishops are what we call the magisterium, the official teachers of the church whose duty it is to safeguard that deposit of faith.

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So let's see how this all played out from the very beginning in the very early church. And let's walk with the Apostle Paul as he goes from city to city in the ancient world, handing on the Word of God. And what we would see Paul do first is he would go into one of these cities, and he would first preach and teach and hand on the gospel orally, he would teach them who Jesus was, how to follow Jesus, the teachings of Jesus. He'd even hand on how to worship and celebrate the Eucharist. And this handing on of the gospel orally is what we call sacred tradition. And then we would see St Paul also appoint leaders, successors of the apostles bishops to oversee these local churches and to continue to orally hand on the teachings of Christ in the way of Christ. But then we also see St Paul handing on the gospel in written form through the letters of instruction and encouragement that he would write to many of these local churches. We see that St Paul wrote letters to the church in Corinth or the Corinthians, or to the church in Ephesus or the Letter to the Ephesians. And when these local churches received these letters from St Paul, not only did they receive them as the authoritative apostolic teaching of Paul, but they soon discerned and realized that these writings of Paul were inspired by the Holy Spirit that these were sacred scriptures that became the New Testament of the Bible. So we see clearly St Paul is handing on the Word of God, both orally, through sacred tradition and also through the written letter, which became the Sacred Scripture of the New Testament.

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The Bible was never meant to be read all alone by itself, apart from church and authority. However, some Christians hold to the doctrine of sola scriptura, or scripture alone, in which they regard the Bible as the only infallible authority with no authoritative interpreter or interpretive community. But the problem with this doctrine is that, in itself, it's unbiblical. The Bible never instructs us anywhere that we should go to Scripture as the only source of divine revelation. In fact, in second, Thessalonians Paul teaches that we're supposed to hold fast to the traditions which he's handed on. So these would be things that he preached to the Thessalonians orally, which they then had to preserve without them being in a letter written to them. Secondly, it's unhistorical in that the infallible authority of the apostles preceded the infallible authority of the New Testament, in that the New Testament wasn't fully written until the end of the first century, and the apostles had their authority before that time. Lastly, it's unworkable. If every Christian is left to interpret the Bible for themselves, controversies result because people don't agree on exactly how to interpret the Bible, and if there's no authoritative interpreter, then there's no referee to adjudicate those disputes. And so what happens is Christians begin splintering and splintering again. So we end up with over 30,000 Protestant denominations, so the doctrine of sola

scriptura is unbiblical. It's unhistorical and it's unworkable, and we need an authoritative interpreter in the magisterium of the church.

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In First Peter, chapter one, verse 25 Peter makes it clear that the word of God cannot be limited to scripture alone. He says in verse 25 the word of the Lord abides forever. And now he's going to define that word for us. He's going to say that word is the good news which was preached to you. Notice what he says here. The good news was preached, not simply written, but preached. That means that the word of God in tradition is just as important as the word of God made written, because both are vehicles of this transmission of the Word of God. Therefore Peter teaches clearly from scripture that we cannot confine the Word of God to scripture alone, according to the Word of God in so

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we've been discussing sacred tradition a lot, but what really is sacred tradition, this thing that's handed on orally from generation to generation, is it just a collection of interesting stories that the apostles told to their successors, who told to their successors and they never wrote them down? Or is it, or is it like a giant 2000 year old telephone game where one person whispers in the ear of another who whispers in the ear of another? Well, I just want to define for you from the Catechism exactly what sacred tradition is. Sacred tradition is what the apostles handed on by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received, whether from the lips of Christ, from His way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. So we can see that sacred tradition is not just about mere words or stories. It's about a way of life. Jesus spent three years with the apostles working with them, praying with them, eating with them, spending time with them, and he communicated many things to them that can't be communicated with mere words and writings. Rather, he communicated an entire way of living.

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What is tradition? Tradition is not simply the passing on of a doctrine or of a custom from generation to generation. It's a family tradition. Tradition is the way a family lives. And so just as we have family traditions in the great household of how we celebrate Christmas, how we celebrate Easter, how we celebrate birthdays, so too does the Christian family of God have tradition? And tradition is about life, and it's about how to live life. Well. So Paul when he teaches the Corinthians in First Corinthians, chapter 11, verse two, Paul tells the Corinthians, I commend you for holding fast to the traditions that I delivered unto you that I received from the Lord. And then later on in that very same chapter, Paul says, In First Corinthians, 11, verse 23 Paul says, For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus, on the night, when he was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, which is the word Eucharist, he broke it and said, This is My body which is given up for you. In other words, Paul, when he handed on the tradition of the Lord of the Corinthians, handed on the Living Liturgy, the liturgy of what Jesus said and did on his last night, that last supper, which became the first mass, and every mass ever since. And so at the family tradition of the Christian family, they gather at the family table of the Eucharist. And now, because of the living tradition, they're able to reenact what Jesus did and what he said. And now the Christian family has a living tradition that goes all the way back to Jesus. That's the key to tradition. It's not just a tradition that goes back to Augustine or to St, you know, or to St Thomas Aquinas. No, every true Catholic tradition, capital T goes back to Jesus,

because Jesus tells us how to be the family of God, and He gives us the way to live as the family of God. And that's why tradition is so vitally important and so full of life and meaning and depth, and that's why the church's family has kept these traditions for 2000 years. It's the way we live as the children of God and the family of God.

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So we can see that there are three dimensions to divine revelation, Sacred Scripture, sacred tradition, and the magisterium, which safeguards both of them. These three elements are often compared to a three legged stool. The legs of the stool being made up of Scripture, tradition and the magisterium. Without one of those, the stool falls over, and the whole system breaks down. Divine Revelation is not preserved in the way that it ought to be. All these three elements are essential for the safeguarding and the handing on of the deposit of faith. And the magisterium is there to preserve the unity of the faith and the unity of the church through the authentic interpretation of Scripture and tradition.

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What are some of the key points we want to make sure we take away? First, God lovingly chose to reveal, to unveil himself to us so we can know Him and love Him and know his plan for our lives. Secondly, Jesus, Christ, the Son of God made man, is the fullness of that divine self disclosure. Thirdly, this divine revelation of Christ was handed on to the church orally in sacred tradition and in writing in Sacred Scripture. Fourth, this deposit of faith, contained in Scripture and tradition was entrusted to the teaching authority of the Church, which serves as its authentic interpreter. And finally, if we want to know God's revelation, for us, we need scripture, tradition and the magisterium that three legged stool each are so intimately connected that one cannot stand without the other. And now let's consider how Jesus, Christ is inviting us to respond to this great gift of divine revelation. In our world today, there are many people who want to make up their own truth, their own morality, their own spirituality, but we have seen that God has sought us out. He has revealed Himself to us and shown us the truth and has shown us the way to live life, and for 2000 years, the Catholic Church has been faithfully guarding and proclaiming all that God has revealed. But will we accept God's revelation as the standard of truth for our lives, and will we accept the authority Christ gave to His Church to interpret this revelation? That's a personal question we must all face. In fact, Jesus said to his apostles, he who receives you receives Me. He who rejects you rejects Me, Jesus Christ wants to meet you in His Church. Will you welcome Jesus into your Life by welcoming His Church?