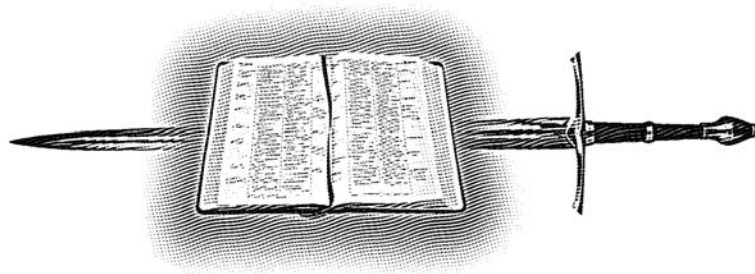


“Sola Scriptura”: Only the Bible



SABBATH—APRIL 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 4:1–6; Titus 1:9; Matthew 21:42; Luke 24:27, 44, 45; Isaiah 8:20.

MEMORY VERSE: “God’s word is alive and working. It is sharper than the sharpest sword and cuts all the way into us. It cuts deep to the place where the soul and the spirit are joined. God’s word cuts to the center of our joints and our bones. It judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts” (Hebrews 4:12, ERV).



In the Protestant faith, the Bible has the final say in deciding what we believe and teach about God.

PROTESTANTS BELIEVE in the “sola Scriptura” rule. “sola Scriptura” means “only the Bible.” This rule shows us that only the Bible teaches us the truth about God and gives us our beliefs. In the Roman Catholic religion, the Bible and tradition, or the teachings of church fathers, decide what is truth. But in the Protestant faith, only the Bible should decide our beliefs and teachings about God.

The Bible helped Protestants to break away from Rome and its false teachings. One of those false teachings was the belief that the Bible was not a true record of history. The Protestants taught that we should believe what the Bible says and the way it says it.

This week, we will look at the teaching of “sola Scriptura,” or only the Bible. We will see that “sola Scriptura” shows us some important rules about understanding the Bible. These rules are necessary. They help us to understand God’s Word, the Bible, clearly. As Protestants, we must remember that only the Bible should decide our beliefs.

THE BIBLE ONLY (1 Corinthians 4:1–6)

As Seventh-day Adventists, we see ourselves as the “people of the Book,” or the Bible. That is, we are Bible-believing Christians. We accept and teach that the Bible is God’s Word. Only the Bible has the final say about our beliefs. That is why we accept only the Bible, or “sola Scriptura,” as the reason for our faith. The Bible shows us how to live. Experience, human reason, and tradition, or the way the church has done things for a long time, are powerful reasons for our faith. But these reasons do not have the Bible’s power to decide what we believe. God gave us the Bible to keep us safe from false teachings in the church. The “sola Scriptura” rule also protects us from deciding what the Bible teaches without the Bible’s help.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1–6 (ICB), Paul says we should “Follow only what is written in the Scriptures.” Why is Paul’s advice so important to our faith?

Paul’s advice does not mean you cannot learn from history or archaeology. Archaeology is the study of past human life. It includes studying the bones and tools of people from long ago. When we study these subjects, we can learn things that help us to understand the Bible better. Also, Paul’s words do not mean that we cannot use dictionaries and other books to help us to understand the Bible. But in the end, the Bible has the final say over science, history, and dictionaries. The Bible helps us to judge all information to see if it is true or false.

What happens if something we learn does not agree with the Bible? Then we allow the Bible to have the final say about what we should believe. That is part of “sola Scriptura” rule too. We should not go against what the Bible says. Our success in preaching the Good News depends on our staying loyal to this important rule.

“Only the Bible is the true Lord and Master of all writings and teachings on earth.”—Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Career of the Reformer II*, eds. Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), volume 32, pages 11, 12, adapted.

Read Acts 17:10, 11. How do these verses show us that the Bible has the final say about what we believe?



The Bible helps us to judge all information to see if it is true or false.

THE BIBLE AGREES WITH ITSELF (Titus 1:9)

The Bible says that “All Scripture is given by God” (2 Timothy 3:16, ERV). The Bible also says, “No prophecy [special message from God] in the Scriptures [the Bible] comes from the prophet’s [special messenger’s] own understanding. No prophecy ever came from what some person wanted to say. But people were led by the Holy Spirit and spoke words from God” (2 Peter 1:20, 21, ERV). God is the real writer of the Bible. So, we can expect the different parts of the Bible to agree and fit with each other.

Read Titus 1:9 and 2 Timothy 1:13. Why do all books in the Bible need to agree and fit with each other? How does this help our faith in God grow strong?

The Bible explains itself. That is because the different parts of the Bible agree with each other. The Bible’s agreement with itself is important. It helps us as a church to have agreement in all our teachings and beliefs. It allows us to understand what is true and what is false. The Bible’s agreement helps us as a church to refuse to accept false teachings and lies. The Bible’s agreement also allows us to correct teachings that go against God’s truth.

Jesus and the Bible writers believe that there is agreement between the different parts of the Bible. They also believe that the Bible came from God. Jesus and the Bible writers show their belief in the Bible’s agreement and value. They often say or write verses from Old Testament books. As an example, Paul in his letters writes verses from Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 14:2, 3; Psalm 5:9; Psalm 10:7; and Isaiah 59:7, 8.

The Bible writers believe that the different parts of the Bible cannot be separated. They believe that the Old Testament and the New Testament agree fully. The New Testament does not teach a new religion. The Old Testament is shown in the New Testament. The New Testament builds on the Old Testament. In this way, the two Testaments are connected. They help explain each other.

The agreement in the Bible between the Old and New Testaments teaches us an important rule. When we study a topic in the Bible, we should look at everything the Bible says about that topic. We should not build our teaching on only one verse or idea.



When we study a topic in the Bible, we should look at everything the Bible has to say about it.

THE BIBLE IS CLEAR ABOUT WHAT IT TEACHES (Matthew 21:42)

Read Matthew 21:42; Matthew 12:3, 5; Matthew 19:4; Matthew 22:31; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3; Matthew 24:15; and Mark 13:14. Jesus talks many times about the Bible. What do His words tell us about its clear message?

The Bible is clear about what it teaches. The Bible is so clear that it can be understood by children and by adults alike. At the same time, the Bible offers us endless chances to learn new things. Our understanding will grow deeper as we study the Bible more. We do not need a group of Bible experts or holy leaders to explain the Bible to us. As believers, all of us can understand the Bible for ourselves. So, we are encouraged by the Bible to study the Bible for ourselves. We can understand God’s message to us.

“The agreement between Bible writers shows us that we can trust the Bible to mean exactly what it says. Of course, sometimes the Bible will use a symbol or a word picture. Then we can expect the word picture to stand for something else. . . . At the same time, we can expect the Bible to explain its own symbols and word pictures too. Their meanings are not something that only very smart people or Bible experts can understand.”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), page 65, adapted. The reason why the Bible is clear is because it uses clear language and words to show us the truth. The Bible writers did not try to give their verses a “private” meaning or a lot of different meanings.

Of course, we will read verses and ideas in the Bible that we do not fully understand. We must remember that we are reading God’s Word, and we are fallen humans. Even so, God’s Word is clear on the things we need to know and understand. This is very true when it comes to the topic of being saved.

Think about a time when you did not understand some verses in the Bible. Later, you understood them better. What did you learn from this experience that can help others who are having the same problem?

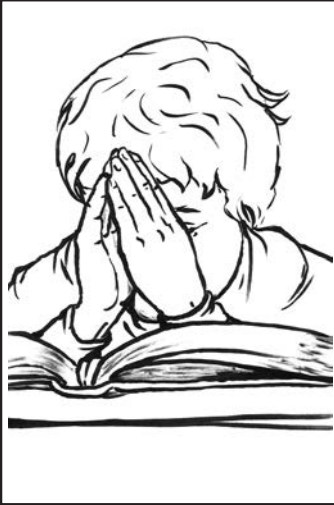


The Bible is so clear that it can be understood by children and adults alike.

THE BIBLE EXPLAINS ITSELF (Luke 24:27, 44, 45)

The Bible explains the Bible. The Bible can do that because there is agreement between the different books of the Bible. Without this agreement, the Bible could not explain its own meaning. Because of the Bible's agreement, we can use one part of the Bible to explain another part.

Read Luke 24:27, 44, 45. How does Jesus use the Bible to explain who He is? How can we use the Bible in the same way to help us to understand its meaning?



We must pray and ask God to make the Bible clear to us.

When we let the Bible explain the Bible, we will understand its truth. The Bible shows us what it means. When we let the Bible explain itself, we will not use verses to prove our own ideas. We will think carefully about what each verse is saying and why. We also should look at the verses before and after the verse we are studying. Then we should study the book of the Bible where we found that verse. Also, we must remember what Paul says when we study the Bible: “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us” (Romans 15:4, ERV). Paul’s words help us to understand that we should study everything that the Bible says about a topic.

“The Bible explains itself. So, we must compare verse with verse. The Bible student should learn to see the different books of the Bible as part of one large book. The student also should see how the different parts of the Bible connect to each other. The student should learn about the Bible’s most important ideas: God’s plan for this earth before sin, the worldwide war between good and evil, and His work to save humans.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 190, adapted.

When we compare verse with verse, we must remember to study the Bible carefully. If possible, we should study the Bible in its original languages. At the very least, find a copy of the Bible that stays true to the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek. We do not need to know Greek and Hebrew to understand the Bible. But our studying the Bible languages can help us to understand a lot. The most important thing we must have when we study is a heart with no pride. We must surrender our hearts to God. Then we must pray and ask Him to make the Bible clear to us. When we do these things, we will have success for sure.

ELLEN G. WHITE AND “SOLA SCRIPTURA,” OR ONLY THE BIBLE (Isaiah 8:20)

Isaiah 8:20 (NLV) gives us advice about the Bible’s teachings and the Law. Why is it always important for us to “ ‘put [our] faith in the teaching and the Law’ ”? What does this verse teach us about how we should view the writings of prophets, or special messengers, that are not part of the Old and New Testaments?

As we saw, “sola Scriptura” is the teaching that only the Bible should decide our beliefs. This causes us to ask an interesting question about Ellen G. White. Her writings are not part of the Bible. At the same time, we believe that God gave her messages for His end-time church. So, the question we must ask is: How do we compare her writings to the Bible?

When we read Ellen G. White’s writings, we see that the Bible is the foundation for everything she taught about God. Again and again, she says that the Bible is God’s Word. In her view, only the Bible should decide our teachings, our faith, and our practices. Most important, Ellen G. White supported the Protestant rule of “sola Scriptura” (read *The Great Controversy*, pages 9 and 595).

In Ellen G. White’s own view, her writings were a “small light. God used this small light to lead men and women to the bigger light.”—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 20, 1903, adapted. What is the bigger light? The Bible is. Ellen G. White’s writings are not a “shortcut” to our understanding the Bible. Her writings do not replace the Bible. She herself wrote to someone, “You do not know the Bible as well as you should. What if you had studied the Bible with the wish to have a perfect heart? Then you would not have needed my messages in the *Testimonies* at all. But you failed to study the Bible. So, that is why God sent you the simple messages in the *Testimonies*. He wanted to touch your heart.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 2, page 605, adapted. Ellen G. White’s writings come to us from the same God who gave us the Bible. But her writings are different from the Bible too. God gave them to us for a different reason. So, her writings are not a new part of the Bible. The Bible has the final say over her writings. Ellen G. White herself never expected her writings to take the place of the Bible. No, she said only the Bible should decide our beliefs and practices.



We believe that God gave Ellen G. White special messages for His end-time church.



“A miner works hard to dig for gold deep in the ground. In the same way, we also must hunt for the treasure in the Bible.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read “The Analogy of Scripture,” pages 64–66, in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Read chapter 20, “Bible Teaching and Study” in the book *Education*, pages 185–192; “The Primacy of the Word,” in *Selected Messages*, book 3, pages 29–33.

“Bible students should be taught to study the Bible with the heart of a learner. We must search the Bible’s pages for truth. But we must not search its pages for proof of our own ideas. No, we must study the Bible to know what God says. We can get a true knowledge of the Bible only with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave Bible truth to the Old and New Testament writers. Also, we cannot get Bible knowledge unless we live what we learn. So, we must obey everything that the Bible commands us to do. . . . When we study the Bible, we will need to work hard and very carefully to understand it. We must not give up. We must work the way a gold miner works. A miner works hard to dig for gold deep in the ground. In the same way, we also must hunt for the treasure in the Bible.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 189, adapted.

“You must make the Bible your food and your drink. You must make Bible truth and its rules a part of your life. Then you will know better how to get advice from God. I hold God’s Word, the Bible, in front of you today. God’s Word is precious. Do not say ‘Sister White said this’ and ‘Sister White said that.’ Read in the Bible for yourselves what the Lord God of Israel says to you. Then do what He says.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 33, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What wrong beliefs do people have because they look at only a few verses from the Bible and not everything the Bible says about an idea?
- ② In Matthew 11:11, (NIRV), Jesus says these words about John the Baptist: “ ‘What I’m about to tell you is true. No one more important than John the Baptist has ever been born.’ ” Jesus says these words about a prophet, or special messenger, who has no writings in the Bible. So, what should Jesus’ words tell us about why a prophet can be a true prophet even if he did not write any book in the Bible?