

17. Telephoning God? (Is the Bible an All-Sufficient Instruction Manual?)

Warning, I'm about to blow the lid off some cherished beliefs. Although the days of physically weighing suspected witches against heavy Bibles is over, **notice the contrast of contradictory beliefs held by those who considered the Bible a complete, self-sufficient revelation:**

People are bodies without spirits-----People are spirits; their bodies will be discarded.
 Women should become bishops-----Women must be silent and wear head coverings.
 Christians must never have weapons-----Christians are obligated to wage war.
 Only our small group will ever be saved-----Eventually everybody will be saved.
 God blesses the faithful financially-----Christians must be poor.
 Jesus will physically reign on Earth----- Jesus will never come again.
 True Christians never sin ever----- Christians may freely sin.
 Church buildings shouldn't exist----- Church buildings should be mega-complexes.
 Christians should attend church every day----- God is not in the churches.
 Christians must help all the poor worldwide----- Christians must only help their own sect.
 Slavery is okay-----Slavery is evil.
 Contraception is evil----- Abortion is good.
 Miracles never occur anymore-----Miracles occur regularly.
 Christians must sever all political ties----- Christians must vote.
 You cannot question church leaders-----Designated leadership is obsolete
 No death penalty under any circumstances-----Death penalty for numerous reasons.
 All Christians have Holy Spirit baptism-----The Spirit resides only in the written word.
 Worship the Trinity-----Only worship one Person
 Jesus was: almighty God only a man only an angel Zoroaster, Buddha, and Muhammad

Supporters of each contradictory belief have prayed for the Holy Spirit's guidance besides.

Since simply reading the Bible and praying for spiritual wisdom is problematic, one minister had over a thousand commentaries to foster Bible knowledge, suggesting that everyone have their own library. If everyone followed his example, with over two hundred pages per book, times fifty congregants, that's a whopping ten million pages of extra-biblical material for just one congregation to understand the Bible. Besides, ignoring historical interpretations sometimes breeds irrational ideas no matter how many study aids you have. **As a serious practitioner of the Christian faith, I seek to eliminate notions which are attributed to Christianity which actually harm the cause of Christ.**

More Results of Simply Reading the Bible

Many groups denounce the papacy because the word pope isn't in the Bible. But to their chagrin, "Jehovah's Witnesses" denounce Trinitarian-ism because the word trinity isn't in the Bible. Likewise, Seventh Day Adventists condemn Sunday worship because the phrase worship on Sunday "isn't biblical." Hundreds of conflicting groups have meandered through history, each claiming the Bible as their exclusive authority or that it demands the "argument from silence." When "rightfully dividing the word" people vehemently disagree on what constitutes rightful division. My father joked: "Did you hear about the blind carpenter who picked up the hammer and saw?" From that statement, someone could argue that picking up a hammer cures blindness. Similar literary abuse often happens with Bible study. Everybody "knows" that they have the right interpretation, but with hundreds of contradictory interpretations, **picking up a Bible doesn't cure spiritual blindness.**

Furthermore, people spend countless hours highlighting thousands of passages in different colors. With an all-sufficient Bible, why would anyone need to do that? Even if it was considered a workbook, where completing it yourself is an important learning tool, Bibles are highlighted in a million different ways. Those who complete workbooks should get the same answers. Highlighting a Bible makes it tailor made; each individual determines the importance or lack of importance of each passage. Thereby we no longer look into the Gospel mirror and submit to it, we create our own gospel.

These laughably contradictory conclusions are the result of private Bible interpretation and divorcing Scripture from the context of the early Church. Since anyone can manipulate the words to come up with anything they want, religious texts continue to be haphazardly juggled as if by a maniacal clown. “The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.....Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!” —Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice Act I, Scene III.(1)

Sola Scriptura

Sola Scriptura (Latin for scripture alone) is defined in radically different ways. One is that Scripture contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. So only doctrines found directly within scripture or which are obviously implied by scripture are admitted or confessed. However, this doesn’t eliminate Church authority; it simply declares that Church authority is subservient to and corrected by Scripture.

This sensible definition is far preferable to having Scripture’s interpretation entrusted to the “living teaching office” of the church alone (implying that the early fathers represent the dead teaching office). Besides, Catholic, Orthodox, and Coptic churches each consider themselves the living teaching office. This also fosters the problematic idea of ongoing revelation. See 14.Revival! under Early Church verses “Ongoing Revelation.”

A second way of defining Sola Scriptura is private Bible interpretation. Although the vast majority claim that they define Sola Scriptura the first way, they don’t. They use private interpretation, which causes chaos. Besides, Scripture needs to be regularly explained, disqualifying it from being all-sufficient. Since the definition of “Sola Scriptura” has become chameleon-like, I don’t call my belief Sola Scriptura; I seek another description.

An All-Sufficient Book?

Throughout history, millions of people could not and cannot read. A book cannot be the exclusive standard for those who cannot even begin to use that standard. Furthermore, God did not implant within the first people the Hebrew language (or Arabic or English). For untold aeons there was no language; people may have been limited to saying “Uggah buggah.” It took thousands of years just to create a language. Illiterate people could better use books as firewood to warm themselves. According to *Where We Got the Bible* “After savages received the written word, tons of Testaments were used for tobacco paper, wallpaper, making kites, and other and fouler uses.”²

The relationship of the first humans to God and others was undoubtedly sharing in stone-work, gardening, and animal husbandry; instinctively knowing God through His handiwork. Perhaps God manifested His presence in miraculous ways too. However, this did not include Him speaking from the sky, unless He thundered “Uggah buggah” in camaraderie (or Yabba Dabba Dooo!). No book descended from Heaven at the dawn of creation as humanity’s instruction manual. For eons, there was no Bible for anybody; again, it wouldn’t have mattered without an existing language.

Even if literate men read scripture to the illiterate, everyone having access to Scripture thereby, people were entirely dependent on churchmen to share Scripture, not magic talking Bibles. Churchmen could have read anything they wanted and called it authoritative; illiterate people wouldn’t have known the difference.

Besides, the Bible contains stories of evil and offensive escapades. Other parts are neutral historical details, census counts, and genealogies. Then there's godly instruction. Even with great study, it's tough to discern the merits or lack thereof of each verisimilar text. Suppose someone is in darkness and lost to the Devil, yet reads the Bible. Now what's causing him to mentally sift the texts, gather up the godly instruction, and avoid being confounded by the rest? Remember, he lacks Christ's light and wisdom, doesn't have His Spirit, and if he was filled with honesty why was he lost to begin with?

Moreover, the Bible was never the Supreme Court. The Church superseded the Judaic priesthood and was the final authority in early Christianity. Besides, much biblical material seems to have purposefully hidden meaning, such as the phantasmagorical book of Revelation. So **an authority was always needed to explain Scripture to receptive people.** Although the early Church considered every bible passage holy and beneficial, that was contingent on interpreting it their way. Misinterpretation was deemed worse than ignorance.

Catholics to the Rescue?

Priests avoid private bible interpretation and present a better understanding. Here is Priest Robert Barron's explanation in condensed form: "Most of my atheistic conversation partners erroneously think that Catholics believe that God dictated the Bible word for word. Rather, it is God's word expressed through the words of men. It is also a collection of different literary genres, not just one book. Therefore you can't approach the Bible with one clunky pair of interpretive lenses. It's not like a newspaper. Rather, you must use different interpretive lenses.

The whole problem is biblical literalism and making a binary option between literal-ism and nonsense, while Catholics have never literalized the Bible. Rather, we have followed the historical tradition of using allegorical, symbolical, spiritual, and other interpretive lenses; a very rich complex subtle interpretive tradition."³

Priest Barron's explanation is excellent. However, he uses bias by referring to interpreting the Bible only one way as a "clunky" interpretive lens, while his half dozen interpretive lenses are "very rich." He uses the same straw man argument that Protestants use, misrepresenting his opponent's position by saying that the Bible is not like a newspaper and refuting the distortion. Nobody says it's like a newspaper. The point is that it's much harder to understand than any other book regardless of genre. And although biblical literalism is a major problem, it's not the whole problem.

Then he undermines his position by stating "By trying to influence the modern world the modern world influenced us instead, causing us to jettison our Christianity, relinquish our weapons of faith, and pursue Modernity." I have another problem with his interpretation, which my next chapter addresses. But first, the big question is, which Bible are we referring to?

Modern Translations

► Outdated Language?: **Knowledgeable people understand that there is always a correlation between your beliefs and practices and the translation you use.** However, people falsely claim that the King James Version uses unintelligible Old English, while 20th century translations use fine tuned modern English. Actually, Old English was used prior to AD 1100; Middle English was current from 1100 through the 1400s. The King James's 1600s English is technically considered Modern English.⁴

Classical Elizabethan terms (thee, thou, saith, et cetera) are easily understood. Sometimes they are more efficient; goeth equals am going; hopeth equals ongoing hope. Also, substituting common English sometimes causes incorrect rendering of tenses. Even the consistent rendering of words in contemporary versions is a step backwards; it creates flatness. The King James' checkered translation and obscure and unique words make memorization easier.

► **The Underlying Texts:** More significantly, the manuscripts underlying the traditional translations are now disputed. Contemporary translations wholly or partly adhere to Westcott and Hort's theory of textual criticism created in the mid 1800s. Westcott and Hort relies on codexes: unbound sheets of parchment written in Greek. If none of the codexes had a passage which traditional Bibles had, the passage was excluded. If most codexes didn't have a passage from the traditional text, the passage was marginalized. These excluded and marginalized verses and verse sections amount to two books of material. The traditional text is abandoned on the pretext that none of the original manuscripts exist and every codex is much older than the received text that traditional Bibles translate from. Seemingly, critical scholars purified Scripture by excluding spurious material which was added later. Correct? Not so fast.

The horse is older than the car. Even a one year old horse is conceptually much older than a model T Ford. That's because she is a duplication of her ancestors over thousands of years. Likewise, the text underlying the old King James lineage of testaments duplicates the texts which passed down through the centuries. We know this because the early fathers quoted the passages that the codexes excluded. Since documented early Church support of the traditional text comes from writings dated from AD 100 to 275 and the codexes date after AD 275 to 400, we know that Westcott and Hort's system (the Critical text) doesn't restore Scripture, it robs it of around 180 verses worth of material. Besides, codexes sometimes contradict each other and most are incomplete.

The original manuscripts weren't preserved because constantly using old manuscripts quickly wore them out. Instead of forever relying on them, they were reproduced, as horses reproduce. We never depend on a thousand year old horse. The fact that the codexes outlasted all other manuscripts actually speaks against their value. We would expect the most reliable manuscripts to be constantly used, and thus disintegrate, while less reliable manuscripts would be rarely used, be spared from wearing out, and thus be the oldest existing texts.⁵

Thankfully, after the invention of the printing press, Desiderius Erasmus gathered together the scattered New Testament manuscripts, and published them in one convenient volume in 1516 (The Textus Receptus or Received Text). Far from initializing his own book, Erasmus spared other people from continually hunting down manuscripts. And the personal life of Erasmus or King James is irrelevant since they weren't the translators.

► **Contemporary Versions Rewrite Scripture:** Most significantly, contemporary translations often paraphrase passages, and not for increased clarity; **they make Scripture reflect biased sectarian viewpoints.** Compare the American Standard of 1901, the most accurate word for word translation, which also relies on modern textual criticism, with today's popular translations.

Advocates of later translations condemn the 1950 New World Translation used by Jehovah's Witnesses, based on its rendering of such passages as John 1:1s the Word was God into the Word was a* god. But there have been over a dozen such "Unitarian" bibles, from Thomas Belsham's 1808 New Testament to those produced in the 1970s, which mirror the New World Translation.

Even the "most accurate" contemporary translation, the New American Standard Bible, removes Christ's deity in several passages, changes references to worshipping Christ into merely bowing before, and has many other deletions and distortions.⁽⁶⁾ Even the so-called "New King James" often omits the terms hell, repent, God, damnation, blood, and distorts other passages, making its translation from the Received Text irrelevant.⁷

Most updated bibles twist passages to make salvation at the point of belief, belief only, or once saved always saved. Passages on divorce and homosexuality are sometimes purposely altered. Some have gender neutral pronouns, supporting a feminist agenda. By removing the word yet from John 7:8, numerous translations make Jesus into a liar (compare with John 7:10). Some translations change Satan's name before he fell, Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12) into morning star, a title for Christ.⁸

The wildly popular English Protestant bible, the New International Version (NIV) sometimes removes Christ's deity, removes the virgin birth, removes the blood of Christ, and removes several

references to worshipping Christ. It diluted and perverted the Lord's prayer (Luke 11:2-4), and quoted Malachi 3:1 in Mark 1:2-3, stupidly saying it's from Isaiah.

And especially bad NIV perversion was translating the underlying Greek word *sarx* (traditionally translated "flesh") into "sinful nature" 28 times in New Testament scripture. This is the opposite of the Christian goal of having a new sinless nature. Bolstering the idea that this was a mistranslation was the NIV publisher's subsequent removal of "sinful nature" in an updated edition (TNIV). But since the TNIV also has a massive amount of other word changes, this should also destroy the TNIV's credibility. Interestingly, the same company to first publish the NIV (Zondervan) simultaneously published Anton La Vey's Satanic Bible.⁽⁹⁾ The popular New Living Translation, a paraphrase, is even more inaccurate.¹⁰

While Scripture admonished servants to obey their masters, contemporary translations change the word servant into slave. Although the underlying word *doulos* appears to be better translated slave; that should be overruled since common sense should tell us that slavery is wrong.

Concerning Catholic Bibles, the Latin Vulgate, a type of received text translated by Saint Jerome from earlier texts around AD 390, was official for over one thousand five hundred years. In a shocking turnaround, it's now defrocked (the Douay-Rheims of 1610, based on the Vulgate, is still recognized as the most accurate Catholic translation). Now today's English Catholic versions use the same underlying text as the "NIV": Westcott and Hort's Critical text. To top it off, these Catholic perversions also rewrite Scripture (poorly). The most popular English Catholic version, the New American Bible (NAB) dilutes and distorts many passages such as the beloved twenty-third Psalm, has heretical footnotes in some copies, and is a third rate version overall. This perversion is a "wolf in calfskin."¹¹

Some "Bibles", such as Thomas Jefferson's dissection, the Readers' Digest Version, the Cabbage Patch Version, and Rappin' with Jesus are butchered cows. Some people even pick the translation whose wording best fits their view on a certain subject, bounce to another if its wording conflicts on another subject, and keep bouncing around. Imagine a High School teacher assigning a book report, then passing out different translations of the book to different students instead of one uniform translation. Since we know that having multiple translations of a book causes confusion, why laud having a superfluous number of Bible translations?

Some reply 'The Devil focuses his attack on Christianity, that's why it's scrambled up.' However, since "Greater is He that is in you than he who is in the world" (I John 4:4) Satan should have been overruled. Instead, it's due to corrupted translations, private interpretation which produced millions of independent popes, and Modernism, where millions of people influence the bishops and produce similar results to private interpretation. Actually, there is no bibliolatry. Rather, private interpretation of any religious book is a form of self-worship; "Thus saith I." Private interpretation by any one particular sect is a form of group-worship; "Thus saith we."

THE SOLUTION

- 1) Only use the most accurate Scripture translation in your native language.
- 2) For Christians, the "Old Testament" has been superseded. Strictly reading and studying the "New Testament" solves most of the problem. Everything needed to obtain salvation and live the Christian life is mentioned in New Testament canon.
- 3) To understand difficult passages clearly, or when disputes may arise, we have the early Church, which preserved and documented the original interpretations.
- 4) Always apply logic, not emotion.
- 5) To help us live out our faith, we have prayer and fellow Christians. Simple!



