Sola Scriptura—By Scripture Alone

**Introduction**

During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, theologians came up with the five sola’s of the Reformed faith.

(1) Sola Scripture—by Scripture alone

(2) Sola Gratia—by grace alone

(3) Sola Fide—by faith alone

(4) Sola Christos—by Christ alone

(5) Sola Dei Gloria—for the glory of God alone

I have briefly introduced ***sola fide*—by faith alone**—in Romans 4 and the story of Abraham. Abraham, the father of all who believe was not justified by his works but by faith. Being justified exclusively on the basis of faith, Abraham has nothing to boast about. In the same way, every Christian is saved by faith alone. As we read from Ephesians 2: 8-10,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NAU)

I believe Paul was saying here that even the faith we have is a gift from God; therefore, surely none of us can boast that we have something within us that others do not have, namely faith, and therefore we may boast that we have faith. No. God gives faith as a gift, and then we exercise that faith by trusting in Christ as our Savior. It is not that we work to earn our salvation (v. 9). Rather, we ourselves are God’s workmanship (v. 10), created in Christ Jesus. After Jesus fed the 5000, the multitudes asked Him,

"What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "**This** is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28-29 NAU)

In other words, God **works** in our hearts to believe the gospel. In the same chapter Jesus says,

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44 NAU)

We have also touched on ***sola gratia*, by grace alone.** We cannot add any human work to the grace of God in order to earn our salvation. Salvation is a free gift based upon the work of Christ on the cross. If we add anything to what Christ has done, then salvation is on the basis of what we add to grace and not grace itself.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in *the passage about* Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." 4 But what is the divine response to him? "**I HAVE KEPT for Myself** SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." 5 In the **same way** then, there has also come to be at the present time **a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice.**6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. (Romans 11:1-6 NAU)

In this passage, Paul is talking about the election of a small number of believing Jews, including him, from the whole Jewish race. God chose these Jews for Himself **not on the basis of works** which they, or Paul, had done, **but on the basis of His sovereign decision** to select them for salvation while He allowed most of the Jewish race to remain in sin and unbelief. His choice of a few was not based on personal merit or the fact that God knew they would one day believe, but because of God’s grace to choose whomever He wanted.

But I wanted to spend the rest of our time on ***Sola Scriptura—by Scripture alone.*** Unless we believe that the Scripture is our **only authority** to determine how men are saved and how men should live their lives, it really will not matter how many scriptures I quote supporting the doctrine of salvation **by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.** Someone will come up to me and say, “Yes, but my priest tells me that not only Scripture is important but the **tradition of the church** is just as important as Scripture. And then everything I said about these other doctrines goes right out the window. So I want to focus now on why I believe that Scripture alone is **sufficient for our understanding of the Christian faith and practice.**

**I. Definition of the Sufficiency of Scripture**

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF 1.6), *Of the Holy Scriptures,* says this about the sufficiency of Scripture:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by **new revelations of the Spirit**, or **traditions of men**. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the **inward illumination of the Spirit of God** to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word….

There are three things about this confessional statement that I want to emphasize: **(1) The traditions of men, (2) new revelations of the Spirit, (3) the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit.**

The Apostle Paul says the same thing as the confession more concisely in 2 Timothy 3: 16-17.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for **every** good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU)

In this statement, Paul says that **everything we need to know** for **every good work** we do is contained in Scripture. Notice that Paul says, “every good work.” Not only are the words of Scripture adequate for every good work of the **preacher, theologian, or missionary**, but they are also adequate for every good work of **the mother who takes care of her children, the farmer, the plumber, the bus driver, or the government official.** Although the Bible is not a book about plumbing or political science, or caring for children, it nevertheless contains principles which help each of us—no matter what we do—to perform our work for the glory of God alone (soli Deo Gloria). Paul says in Ephesians 2: 10,

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 NAU)

In other words, every one of us as believers are supposed to do good works, and good works include many ordinary things we do every day.

If you are a Christian bus driver or a matatu driver, the word of God should be profitable for you for the **good work** of transporting your passengers safely to their destinations. That is a good work. It is a bad work for you to get them killed because of your reckless driving. Your first priority is not to make more money for your boss by getting people to their destination more quickly at the risk of accidents, but to get your passengers to their destination **safely** within a reasonable period of time. You cannot take unnecessary risks while driving your matatu for the glory of God, even if you have the words “God is good” written large on the back window of your matatu. God does not want His name taken in vain on the back window of a matatu while the driver runs others off the road and passes others over hills.

If you’re a Christian doctor, you can’t steal medicine donated by western pharmaceutical companies and then sell them in your private clinic. You can’t do that for the glory of God. You can only do it for your own back pocket. If you obey Scripture, you have to give donated medicine away to needy patients for the glory of God. Scripture is profitable for every good work of a doctor.

As a Christian shop-keeper, you must be honest with your customers about what you sell. You don’t sell rotten eggs if you know they are rotten, and you don’t charge bazungus twice as much for the same tomatoes. Scripture is profitable for every good work of the Christian shop-keeper.

As a Christian who plasters houses, the Scripture should be profitable for you. In order to do good work, you must use sufficient cement in your plaster mix. Many plasterers use too much sand and too little cement, which makes the plaster fall off the walls after a period of time. Sand is much cheaper than cement, so they diminish the quality of their work so they can make more money. But God sees what you do, and He will reward you for doing good work and will punish you for doing poor work.

There are principles in Scripture which will help you in every good work you do. The Apostle Paul says, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do**, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31 NAU). There it is again—***soli Deo Gloria****.* There is nothing in life that we do that is **neutral**—neither good nor bad—nothing about which God says, “I really don’t care what you do in this situation or how you do it **as long as you go to church and pray**. You can sin all you please as long as you attend church regularly and drop one thousand shillings in the offering bag once and a while.” No, God cares about **everything** we do, from the smallest thing to the greatest thing. He cares about our **attitudes** while we are working—whether we are thankful or unthankful, whether we are loving or unloving, whether we are joyful or fearful. **He cares about all the reasons** for doing what we do. Are we trying to please ourselves or other men? Are we doing something to gain a personal reputation for good deeds? Are we doing something just to feel better about ourselves? Or, are we doing something because it brings honor and glory to God? For this reason, we need Scripture to teach us how to go about our daily labors and to give us the right attitudes and motives in our labors.

**II. The Necessity of Reason or Logic in Applying Scripture to Different Situations**

We need logic and reasoning to determine how to apply the principles of Scripture to every

situation. For example, the Bible says, **“Do not steal.”** But what is stealing? Some people may define stealing as breaking into someone’s house and taking away something that belongs to the other person.

But is it stealing to **embezzle** money from your employer—little by little so that he doesn’t notice what you are doing? Is it stealing to **waste a person’s time**? You tell them to meet you at 11 AM but it is 1 PM before you show up. They have been waiting for you two hours with nothing to do. Have you stolen their time? Is it stealing to spend time in town talking with your friends when you are supposed to be running an errand for your boss or taking inventory in the shop? Is it stealing to **ruin a person’s reputation** by making up lies about his character? Now he has a difficult time getting work because you have accused him of stealing, but he didn’t steal. Is **adultery** a form of theft—when you take a wife away from her husband or a husband away from his wife? Is it a form of lying and theft to **cheat on an exam** in secondary school or college?

**If we fail to use reason, then we seriously limit the Scripture’s application for every good work.** Unless we see examples of cheating on exams in the Scripture—and we won’t see them—then we will think cheating on tests is okay if we can get away with it, or if it leads to good results like getting a good grade, getting through school, getting a good job, and helping the family with the money we earn on a job that we did not deserve. Then we rationalize that the good result justifies the means to that result, cheating.

The confession says, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either **expressly set down** in Scripture, or **by good and necessary consequence** *[****that is, by reasoning]*** may be deduced from Scripture.”

To be an intelligent Christian, you must be able to take the Scriptures and reason from the Scriptures to situations which are “not expressly set down” or mentioned in Scriptures. Otherwise, there will be many situations in your life that do not seem to be covered in the Scriptures, but only because you have not thought carefully enough about how the Scripture applies to this or that situation.

To use one example: **Can Christians marry Muslims?** You cannot find the word, Muslim, in the entire Bible, so I suppose it is okay for a Christian to marry a Muslim, correct? No. The Bible says that Christians are **allowed to marry only Christians.**

A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39 NAU)

So we see here that a Christian wife—Paul is speaking specifically to the Christian church, not to everyone in Corinth—who has lost her husband through death can remarry, but only “in the Lord”. She is not allowed to marry anyone she pleases. She can only marry a Christian. By logical deduction or reasoning, she cannot marry a Muslim because a Muslim is not a Christian. To put it in the form of a logical syllogism, we would say this:

Premise A: Mary, a Christian woman, can only marry a Christian man.

Premise B: Robert is not a Christian.

Conclusion: Mary cannot marry Robert.

This is just a simple logical deduction, **but you might be surprised how many people cannot make such logical deductions from Scripture.** But even the statement in 1 Corinthians 7: 39 has to be qualified, because **Paul was not saying that death was the only way** that a woman could remarry, nor was he saying only the widow could get remarried but not the widower. Does this command apply **to the man as well as the woman**? Yes. The Christian man who loses his wife can also be remarried. Can he be remarried to whomever he pleases? No—only to a Christian woman. But it does not say anything about the man in this verse, only the woman. But we reason from Scripture that if Paul is allowing the Christian widow to remarry in the Lord, then he is also allowing the Christian widower to remarry in the Lord. The Scriptures will not deal with every situation.

Are there other reasons than death that allow Christians to remarry? One important principle of Scriptural interpretation is that Scripture interprets Scripture. You can’t just read this one verse in 1 Corinthians 7 and conclude that only widows and widowers can get remarried. In Matthew 19, Jesus allows a husband to remarry in case his wife commits adultery.

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for immorality**, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9 NAU)

You must use reasoning to understand this verse. Let’s leave out the phrase, “except for immorality” and read the verse without this phrase.

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife…and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9 NAU)

What does this mean? Without the clause, “except for immorality”, Jesus would be saying that any time a man divorces his wife and marries another woman, he commits adultery. And this is what the Anglican Church teaches if I am not mistaken. All divorce is sin, and all divorce results in adultery. But this is not what Jesus said. What He said was,

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for immorality**, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9 NAU)

The little clause, “except for immorality” changes the meaning of the verse. Now it means that if a man divorces his wife **because she has committed adultery** or some other form of immorality (homosexuality maybe?), he may marry another woman without committing adultery. **The exceptional clause applies not only to the divorce but also the remarriage.**

We also know that the exceptional clause applies not only to the divorce but the remarriage. In other words, the wife’s adultery legitimates (makes legitimate) not only the divorce but the remarriage. Let’s read the verse without the phrase, “except for immorality, and marries another woman.”

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife…commits adultery."

This verse makes no sense. How does a man commit adultery just by divorcing his wife? Divorce can be a sin, but divorce is not adultery. He commits adultery by marrying another woman **unless** his former wife has committed adultery or some other immoral act. The adultery of the wife makes both the divorce and the remarriage legitimate.

But let’s take this a little further. **This verse says nothing about women**; therefore, women can never divorce their husbands for any reason at all and marry another man. Correct? No. **Incorrect.** By logical deduction, a Christian woman can divorce her husband for the **same reason**—immorality in various forms, including adultery. If she divorces her husband for another reason—at least according to **this** verse—she commits adultery by marrying another man. However, if her former husband has committed adultery, she can divorce him and marry another man without committing adultery—but only a Christian man.

You can see then, that **we must use logical reasoning** in order to understand Scripture. Some of you may be saying, “I can never understand the Bible; it’s too difficult, and I’m not intelligent enough.” Well, the Bible was not written for nuclear scientists, philosophers, or brilliant people. It **was written for ordinary people like you and me**—missionaries, carpenters, truck drivers, school teachers, and mothers. So we are responsible to read it and understand it to the best of our ability; and if we don’t understand it, we should go to our pastors and teachers in the church who are responsible to teach us the Bible. And if these pastors and teachers **do not have the ability** to understand the Bible, or if they are **too lazy** to study the Bible or **too proud** to learn from other people who know more about the Bible than they do, then **I would suggest you find another pastor** who has more intelligence, and one who is not lazy or proud. And if you are not willing to search for a pastor like that, then **you might go to hell for lack of information.**

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, 15 and that from childhood **you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15 NAU)

The **Scriptures alone** are able to give us wisdom that leads to salvation, but the Scriptures will not give us wisdom leading to salvation **if we don’t understand them.**

**III. Nothing Can Be Added to Scripture as a Regulation for Faith and Practice**

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either **expressly set down in Scripture**, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: **unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by** **new revelations of the Spirit**, **or** **traditions of men**.

In the ancient Near East, there were curses prohibiting the addition or subtraction of anything not contained in the original covenantal document. Listen to these Scriptures from the OT and NT.

"You **shall not add to the word** which I am commanding you, **nor take away from it**, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2 NAU)

"Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; **you shall not add to nor take away from it.** (Deuteronomy 12:32 NAU)

Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. 6 **Do not add to His words** Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6 NAU)

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them,** God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; 19 and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book** of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19 NAU)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel **contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:8-9 NAU)

The Scriptures do not forbid learning mathematics from math textbooks or science from technical journals, or current events from the newspapers. We are permitted to gather information from outside the Bible. What the Bible forbids is **adding or taking away** any of **God’s divine words** written in the Bible by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

But secondly, the Bible forbids us from putting any other words or information on the **same level** **of importance as the Bible**. According to Paul’s words in Galatians, whoever brings a message that is contrary to the gospel message Paul **had already taught** the Galatians, is accursed, even if this person is an angel or Paul himself.

Now it could be argued that many of God’s words were added to the Bible **since the time Moses** wrote he first five books of the Bible. Moreover, Galatians was Paul’s first epistle, and he wrote all his other epistles after Galatians. Does this mean Paul is accursed by adding to the Scriptures? No, because the only thing forbidden is the addition of words which are **not God’s words**. No other words can be added to the Bible **except God’s own words**, and no words of God should be subtracted from the Bible. The prophetic books of the Bible—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc.—were the words of God given to Israel and Judah through the prophets; and the history books of 1 and 2 Kings and so forth were also divinely inspired, as well as the wisdom books and Psalms. Jesus and the Apostles quote many portions of **most** of these books, showing that they **accepted** these books as inspired by God.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18 NAU)

Throughout the gospel accounts we read Jesus’ words concerning the OT with the repeated formula, “It is written”.

But He answered and said, "**It is written**, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:4 NAU)

Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, 46 saying to them, "**It is written**, 'AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." (Luke 19:45-46 NAU)

The apostles of Jesus use the same formula and quote the OT as the word of God.

…**just as it is written**, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (Romans 9:33 NAU)

…but **just as it is written**, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (1 Corinthians 2:9 NAU)

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; 16 **because it is written**, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Peter 1:14-16 NAU)

Jesus and the apostles were constantly quoting the OT Scriptures as divinely authoritative. Peter assures his readers that the words of Scripture **did not come to us through the human will**, but had their origin from the Holy Spirit.

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NAU)

We also know that Peter **accepted Paul’s writings** as Holy Scripture equal to the OT.

…and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, **as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16 NAU)

Peter considered Paul’s writings to be included in “the rest of the Scriptures”. But Paul himself considered his own writings to be inspired of God, as well.

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard **from us**, you accepted *it* not *as* **the word of men,** but *for* what it really is, **the word of God,** which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that **the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.**38 But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized. (1 Corinthians 14:37-38 NAU)

But, you might ask: Are there other books which also have the same authority as the OT and NT? I do not know of **any other books** that have the same authority. But the **Mormon Church** accepts the *Book of Mormon* as divinely inspired which is the history of the Mormon Church and the revelations claimed by their prophet, Joseph Smith. The **Christian Scientists** say they believe the Bible but they also believe what Mary Baker Eddy wrote in her book, *Science and Health With a Key to the Scriptures.* The Roman Catholic Church believes in the inspiration of the *Apocrypha* , books written between the times of the OT and the NT and consisting of material about two-thirds the size of the NT. It is considered a mortal sin not to accept these books as equal to Scripture (Boettner).

We learned earlier that Jesus and the apostles quoted the OT repeatedly, but **we do not have a single quote from the apocryphal books from Jesus in the gospels or from the apostolic writings in the NT.** The Palestinian Jews living at the time of Christ did not accept the *Apocrypha* as divinely inspired. In spite of these facts, the RCC ruled in 1546 that the *Apocrypha* is part of Scripture, and it is included in copies of the **RC Bible.**

But now I want to talk about another little phrase in the WCF that pertains to **traditions.**

**A. Traditions of men**

…unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, **or traditions of men.**

The RCC, and to some extent the Anglican Church, also believes in the authority of the **traditions of the Church** handed down from generation to generation—they say, since the time of the apostles. Let’s look at some of these traditions.

**1.** **The RCC tradition about the Virgin Mary**

The RCC holds to the **Immaculate Conception** of the virgin Mary—that is, that Mary the mother of Jesus was born without original sin. But there is nothing in the Bible about Mary being born without sin. The RCC also teaches that Mary **remained a virgin** her whole life even after Jesus was born. But the Bible teaches that Jesus had brothers and sisters born to Mary after Jesus was born.

He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? 55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, **and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 "And His sisters, are they not all with us?** Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?" (Matthew 13:54-56 NAU)

The context of this passage demands that the words, “brothers” and “sisters” be interpreted as **biological** brothers and sisters, not spiritual brothers and sisters. The men of Nazareth were recalling Jesus’ humble origins and the fact that they knew his family from birth.

The RCC would have to claim that these extra brothers and sisters were **adopted children** of Joseph and Mary, but where is the evidence in Scripture for that, and how could a poor carpenter like Joseph afford to adopt this many children on the poor wages he earned? Joseph, the father of Jesus, is not mentioned here because he has probably already died by this time.

The RCC also believes in the practice of **praying to Mary and other saints**, but he Bible specifically tells us to pray to our Father in heaven. There is only **one mediator** between God and man, the God-man Jesus Christ.

"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. (Matthew 11:27 NAU)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but **through Me.** (John 14:6 NAU)

**2. The RCC tradition about Peter being the first pope of the RCC**

At the Vatican Council in 1870, the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church was declared infallible—without error—when speaking in His official capacity (*ex cathedra*) as the Roman Catholic Pope. The Reformed church, including all Protestant denominations, has always denied this claim as well as the succession of popes coming down from the original apostles. If the Pope after 1870 is infallible, what does the RCC say about **Peter who—according to Scripture—was not infallible**? The Apostle Paul had to rebuke Peter in Antioch for being inconsistent in his teaching about uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter was eating with the Gentiles before some men came from Jerusalem, but after that, Peter refused to eat with them. Paul later told the story of how he **rebuked Peter** in the presence of the whole church.

But when Cephas *[another name for Peter]* came to Antioch, **I opposed him to his face**, **because he stood condemned**. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. (Galatians 2:11-12 NAU)

So I would ask the RCC: If Peter the Apostle of Jesus Christ had to be **corrected by Paul**, then why don’t you claim **Paul** as your pope? Besides, **Peter had a wife**, and no RC pope is allowed to have a wife. Paul says to the Corinthians,

Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? (1 Corinthians 9:5 NAU)

There is no evidence in Scripture that the **other apostles treated Peter in any special way** in their epistles. He is not mentioned in any of the epistles except in Galatians and is not given any special distinction whatever, except that Paul was forced to rebuke him in the presence of the whole church in Antioch. In **Acts 15** the Jerusalem church got together with all the apostles to decide an important issue concerning the Gentiles. **If Peter had been Christ’s chosen leader** of the whole church, he could have decided the issue by himself **without the council of Acts**. Moreover, it was **James**, the brother of Jesus, not Peter, who came up with the best argument for not circumcising the Gentiles.

**3. The RC tradition concerning purgatory (Boettner)**

In the RC tradition, only those believers who have attained sinless perfection or those who die immediately after baptism, or Christian martyrs, can go immediately to heaven. Baptism removes all previous guilt both original and actual, so if you die immediately after this removal of all guilt, you do not have to go to purgatory. (You can see here that the RC doctrine of sinless perfection and baptism are also contrary to Scripture. Scripture does not teach that the sacrament operates **automatically**, but is a sign and seal of an inward reality wrought by only by the Holy Spirit in regeneration, not a RC priest. Moreover, in 1 John we have seen that no Christian can say that he is without sin.)

In the RC tradition, all unbaptized adults and baptized adults committing a mortal sin after baptism go immediately to hell—again, contrary to the example of the thief on the cross who goes to heaven without being baptized. Everyone else has some degree of sin which must be **purged away** (hence the word, “purgatory”) by suffering a longer or shorter time in an intermediate place called purgatory between heaven and hell. Once this sin is purged—whether in a few hours or a thousand years—the individual is then fit for heaven.

Thus, the RC doctrine of purgatory teaches that the atoning work of Christ is insufficient to forgive all sin, especially mortal sin which must be purged away with the suffering of the individual in the flames of purgatory. God therefore forgives sin, **kind of**, but He **really doesn’t forgive sin**. The believer must still suffer in purgatory **to atone for his own sin**. Purgatory can be cut short by the relatives and loved ones on earth who may earn indulgences (relief from suffering) through monetary payments, masses, prayers, etc. Through the money raised from Catholics from indulgences, huge cathedrals have been built even in poor countries while the masses have remained poor. Moreover, the RCC has been able through indulgencies to amass large portions of land in many countries, so much so that governments have been forced to confiscate and redistribute this land to remedy the economic situation.

It is no secret to anyone that the RCC is the wealthiest church on earth which has amassed immense land holdings and monetary assets. In a word, it is rich beyond imagination. One therefore wonders, with all the suffering in purgatory—according to their own doctrine—why the RC pope does not freely release suffering Catholics from purgatory without them having to pay the RCC.

**But what is the teaching of Scripture?** The Scriptures teach that after physical death a true believer goes immediately to heaven in spirit to await his glorified body at the return of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—7 for we walk by faith, not by sight— 8 we are of good courage, I say, and **prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord**. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8 NAU)

Paul recognized that there would be an **intermediate state** for every believer who died before the return of Christ in which the believer’s **spirit** would be in heaven while his body would be in the grave awaiting the resurrection from the dead (1 Thes. 4: 13-18). Yet, that did not keep him from **“preferring”** the intermediate state to life in the body here on earth. To be absent from the body meant to be at **home with the Lord**, not suffering in purgatory. It should be said that Paul was not writing this as a description only of what **his experience was going to be** as an apostle, but what was true of **every true believer** in Jesus Christ. Moreover, Jesus said,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and **does not come into judgment**, but has passed out of death into life. (John 5:24 NAU)

Jesus says here that the one who believes in Him will not come into judgment, including the judgment of a RC purgatory which exists only in the minds of Roman Catholics.

And he *[the thief on the cross]* was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, **today** you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43 NAU)

According to the RC doctrine of purgatory, surely this thief (who was probably also a murderer) hanging next to Jesus would have to serve **at least a thousand years in purgatory** to atone for his many mortal sins; but this is not what Jesus tells him. He assures the thief that **today** he will be with Him in Paradise, another word in Scripture for heaven. Scripture also teaches that the atoning work of Christ for sinners is “finished”; it does not need additional works by Christians.

Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, **"It is finished!"** And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30 NAU)

With the atoning work of Christ, there is **nothing left for the sinner to do** except to believe what Christ has done. Christ has **finished** the work of atonement for the forgiveness of sins.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us that the believer and the unbeliever go immediately to heaven or hell.

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20 "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed with the *crumbs* which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22 "Now the poor man died **and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 "In Hades** he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. (Luke 16:19-23 NAU)

Lazarus dies and goes to Abraham’s bosom, another name for heaven, while the rich man dies and goes to Hades, another name for Hell. No purgatory is mentioned in this passage. Jesus was not trying to give us a complete doctrine of the intermediate state in this passage, so he mentions the rich man’s physical suffering. We learn more about the intermediate state in the epistles of Paul.

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet **the spirit is alive** because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10 NAU)

Only the spirits of men doomed to hell will experience suffering for sin. **The spirits of righteous men will “live”** because the principle of life and righteousness is given to them. Suffering in purgatory cannot not be described as life but only as a form of death.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire **to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;** (Philippians 1:21-23 NAU)

In this passage, Paul did not say this for his own sake, but for the sake of the Philippian Christians. He wanted them (and us) to understand that **being with Christ** **is even better than** **remaining in service** **to Christ.** If this only applied to Paul, then it would have been heartless for Paul to say that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Dying would not be gain if most believers spent 100 to 300 years in the flames of purgatory.Paul encourages us with the confidence that the intermediate state—about which Scripture tells us very little—is still **better** than this physical, earthly life.

**3. The Anglican and RC tradition of the authority of bishops over pastors**

There is also **no evidence of an unbroken chain of bishops** coming down from the original

apostles. This means that all the popes and bishops of the RCC and all the bishops of the Anglican Church in England have no right to claim the **authority of the original apostles**. Where is the evidence of their unbroken lineage traced all the way back to the original apostles? There is no historical or biblical evidence for this.

There is no evidence in the Scriptures for bishops being placed **over the pastors** of several churches, as in the **Anglican and RC tradition**, and increasingly in the **Pentecostal tradition**. In the Pentecostal tradition, as in the Anglican and RCC tradition, the pastors with the biggest churches in the biggest cities wielded more authority than pastors in smaller churches and cities. But again, where do we find it in the Bible that pastors of bigger churches in bigger cities had more authority than any other pastor?

In the Bible the word “elder” and “bishop” are the **same office**; they are the **same person.**

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. 17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the **elders** of the church. (Acts 20:16-17 NAU)

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers,** to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28 NAU)

The identity of elders and bishops in the Bible is so obvious that **RC’s and Anglicans do not bother to defend their practice of separating them from the Bible.** They admit that the office of bishop developed gradually from the practice of the churches in the first five centuries. Yet, they hold that they are good traditions because of the authority of the church in deciding issues of this sort. **But while we might be able to accept some ecclesiastical practices that are only supported from tradition, there are many others which we have already mentioned that concern the issues of salvation**—what books have authority over me for my faith and practice, and do the apocryphal books actually contradict the Bible? Do I pray to Mary or God the Father? Who is my real mediator? Do I look forward to a thousand years of purgatory or do I immediately go to heaven when I die? I am not willing to risk my salvation on anything but the Bible, but **neither am I willing to submit myself to the authority of bishops who are not sanctioned by the NT.**

**4. Traditions of the PCA**

There are also traditions about elders in my own church, the **Presbyterian Church in America**, that I **disagree** with, and I do not consider them binding on my conscience. My denomination says that **teaching elders** are different from **ruling elders** in the church, but I see no evidence of this in 1Timothy 5.

The elders **who rule well** *[hence, ruling elders]* are to be considered worthy of double honor, **especially** **those** who work hard at **preaching and teaching**. (1 Timothy 5:17 NAU)

According to this verse, the elders who work hard at preaching and teaching are among the ruling elders. The ruling elders should be paid well, but especially **those ruling elders** who work hard at preaching and teaching.

The PCA also says that **teaching elders** **do not have their membership** in the churches they pastor, but in the presbyteries which consist of several churches. I believe in having groups of like-minded churches in presbyteries, but I find no evidence in Scripture that a Presbyterian pastor should have his membership in the presbytery and not his local church. This seems to imply that **the local church is too incompetent** to deal with disciplinary issues among pastors, but in 1 Timothy 5, Paul says,

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.

20 Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful *of sinning*. (1 Timothy 5:19-20 NAU)

Does this verse apply only while Timothy is alive, or is Paul laying down regulations that will apply in the life of the church forever? Where is the sinning elder rebuked for public sin? The verse says, “in the presence of all”, but **who is all**? The presumption of the text is the **whole church**, as we also find in 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18.

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**; and if he refuses to listen even to the **church**, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17 NAU)

The Book of Church Order of the PCA takes the position that “the church” in this passage must be identified as **the session of the church** defined as the assembly of elders, not the congregation. However, when we look at 1 Corinthians 5, the context indicates that the whole church is involved in the discipline of the erring member. Paul writing to the church at Corinth says,

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife *[incest].* 2 You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed **would be removed from your midst.** 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, **when you are assembled**, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5 NAU)

Who must be assembled to deliver this incestuous man over to Satan? The elders of the church? No. They are **not even mentioned** in the passage, so how must we prove that the assembled elders is equated to “the church”, either here or in Matthew 18? We can’t. We have to read this into the text—an inference or deduction which is **neither good nor necessary.**

I also find evidence in the Scriptures **that pastors and elders are the same office**, but my denomination does not seem to practice this. Most elders in PCA churches are **businessmen**, but they don’t do much pastoring or shepherding of the flock. Yet, Peter says,

Therefore, I exhort the **elders** among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 **shepherd** the flock of God among you, **exercising oversight** *[episkopeo, from which we get the word “bishop”]* not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3 NAU)

I **do agree** with the policy of the PCA to **forbid women to hold the office of elder** in the church. Women should not become pastors or elders. The Anglican Church allows this practice as do the Pentecostal Churches, but the Bible forbids women to teach or to exercise spiritual authority over men in the church. They may not preach to men or teach men the Bible because it violates the order of creation which God established.

A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. 12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 13 For it was Adam who was **first created**, *and* then Eve. 14 And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1Timothy 2:11-14 NAU)

Eve was deceived primarily in thinking that she could make an independent decision about the fruit without first consulting her husband. Satan blind-sided her by approaching her before Adam showed up, but when Adam did show up, he went along with it anyway, therefore abdicating or giving up his role as the head of Eve.

**5. Non-biblical traditions regulating the life of the Christian and the church**

There are also church traditions which regulate how you live your life as a Christian—traditions which are not taught in the Scriptures. For example, the RCC teaches that it is a sin for women to practice **contraception**. But where do we read in the Bible that you have to have as many babies as you can? Are you women required by God to be **continually pregnant** until you are 45 years old? I don’t find this requirement in the Bible. The command, “Be fruitful and multiply”, does not tell us **how fruitful** we must be, and **every husband and wife must decide together** how many children they can provide for and nurture in the Christian faith.

There is also the tradition that you cannot be a “born-again” Christian if you **drink alcohol**. But Jesus converted 480 liters of water into alcoholic wine at the wedding in Cana. This was His first miracle, and the **headwaiter**—who certainly knew what fermented wine tasted like—admitted that the wine Jesus produced was **better** than the wine he had served before the miracle (Jn. 2: 10). Jesus was accused of being a **drunkard**, but you don’t get drunk on grape juice (Matt. 11: 19). The word for the “wine” Jesus created at the wedding in Cana is the same word Paul uses for wine in Ephesians 5: 18 and 1 Timothy 5: 23.

And do not get drunk with wine *[oinos]*, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (Ephesians 5:18 NAU)

No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine *[oinos]* for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. (1 Timothy 5:23 NAU)

The wine Paul told Timothy to drink in moderation was the same kind of wine that he said would make you drunk. Don’t get drunk and lose control of yourself with wine, Paul said, but be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Drinking a little alcohol is not sinful, but **getting drunk is sinful.**

Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is **intoxicated** by it is not wise. (Proverbs 20:1 NAU)

Once again, we must use reasoning to understand Scripture. The writer of the Proverb does not say, “Whoever drinks wine is not wise.” Rather, he says, “Whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.” There is a difference between drinking wine and beer and being intoxicated and drunk with it. And it is not true that once you take one drink of alcohol you **cannot stop drinking until you are drunk**. If anyone here wants to go get me a beer, I will prove it to you.

I am weary of legalistic Christianity in Uganda that condemns people for drinking one beer. Professing Christians allow people to slander their neighbors with lies, and they allow husbands to sleep with multiple women, but drinking one beer is a sin. The Bible condemns the first two sins but allows the third.

**Jesus warned the Jews not to neglect the word of God for the sake of their traditions.** Often when we obey our traditions which are **not commanded** by God, we will **violate** what God actually commanded. We have an inspired example of this in Mark 7.

The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; 11 but you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),' 12 you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; 13 *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." (Mark 7:5-13 NAU)

God’s word only required the **priests** to ceremonially wash their hands when they were serving in the temple. He did not require ordinary people to wash ceremonially before eating. What these Pharisees were doing was allowing people to shelter their income and material possessions away from their aging parents who needed their financial help in old age. Because of the man-made rule called *corban*, a man would tell his parents, “I would like to help you but our money is given to God.” What that meant was that their money would be donated to the temple **after their death**, but until then he could continue to use his money while he lived. But he would tell his old, crippled parents. “Sorry, I would like to help you, but I have donated my money to God.” So Jesus is condemning them for making **man-made rules that set aside** God’s rule to honor mother and father with financial assistance. And he adds, “You do all sorts of things like this.”

[Incidentally, Jesus’ remarks in this passage imply that honoring father and mother includes financial assistance if necessary.]

There is a saying I once heard that I repeat often**: “He who forbids what God allows will soon allow what God forbids.”** Once we begin to make up rules that God never made, we will soon violate the rules God did make.

One of those rules, for example, is for church congregations to provide for the needs of their pastors. This is taught in 1Timothy 5: 18 and 1 Corinthians 9.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18 NAU)

Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:7-14 NAU)

So the Lord and Paul **directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel**. They are supposed to be paid by their churches. But what happens in the Anglican Church? The money collected that could be used for providing food and shelter for the lay reader and the pastor, and money that could be used to put iron sheets on the unfinished church, is sent to the diocese to run the administration of the church to pay some people who sit around an office all day long reading newspapers, or to build a big two-story mansion for the bishop in Mbarara. By doing this, Anglicans **violate the clear command of God for the sake of their ecclesiastical tradition.** Many Pentecostal pastors are no better, and I will get to them later when I talk about their false claim of being **“the man of God”** who receives direct revelation from God rather than from the Bible.

**Now, I could have spent this whole conference** pointing out differences between the traditions of the RCC, the Anglican Church, the PCA, and other denominations, and the Bible. **No denomination is guiltless** when it comes to putting ecclesiastical tradition ahead of the word of God. I am not here to prove that all these traditions are wrong in two hours. Some of our church traditions are good; they are not all bad. Some things can be done in the church and by individual Christians even if you can’t find it explicitly in the Bible. Do we sing five songs at church or ten? Do we allow soloists to sing or should we only have a choir? Does the preacher preach thirty minutes or one hour? Those are issues about which we have liberty of conscience. The Bible does not prescribe an order of worship or the specific kinds of songs we sing as long as all of them are honoring to God. But what is honoring to God can also be a fuzzy issue when it comes to choosing hymns and songs to sing in church.

**What** **I object to are traditions which explicitly contradict the Bible.** And even the ones which do not contradict the Bible **are not binding** on my conscience. If you accept them as authoritative and binding on your conscience, then you demonstrate that you are **basing your faith and the practice of your faith** on something besides the Bible; and I have already shown you that the Bible itself condemns the practice of putting any writings on the **same level** of authority as the Bible. The Bible is all we need to lead us to salvation in Jesus Christ and all we need to understand how to please God in every good work.

**B. New Revelations of the Spirit**

Again, returning to the WCF, *Of the Holy Scriptures.*

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by **new revelations of the Spirit**, or traditions of men.

I have talked about the danger of considering the **traditions of men** on the same level as Scripture or just **as important** as Scripture. Now I want to talk about “new revelations of the Spirit.”

Throughout the history of the church, some men and women have claimed to receive new revelations of the Holy Spirit which would benefit the church. Some theologians have allowed the possibility of such revelations **on the condition** that they are **not treated in the same way** as the written revelation of the Bible. Moreover, these same theologians have maintained that **no moral commandments** coming from continuing revelation need to be obeyed if such commandments are not confirmed by Scripture. Thus, **Wayne Grudem**, who believes in the **continuing gift of prophecy** in the NT church, says this:

…we must be careful never to allow (in theory or in practice) the placing of such revelations on a level equal to Scripture. We must insist that God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his work in the world that is contained in these revelations but **not in Scripture**. And we must insist that God does not require us to obey **any moral directives** that come to us through such means but that are not confirmed in Scripture. The Bible contains all the words of God we need **for trusting and obeying him perfectly** (Grudem, ST, p. 132, emphasis mine).

Let me remind you again of Paul’s words to Timothy in his second epistle to Timothy.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be **adequate, equipped for every good work.** (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU)

“The man of God” Paul is talking about is Timothy, but not Timothy **standing alone**. The man of God is Timothy and whoever Timothy entrusted with the word of God in the OT or the teachings of Paul. Paul says to Timothy,

The things **which you have heard from me** in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to **faithful men** who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2 NAU)

So, obviously, Paul does not use the term “man of God” for **some special group of NT prophets** who see visions and predict the future for other people. The man of God would include **all believers** who receive the teaching of the Bible and live by it. It is not God’s purpose for a **few** Christians in this world to be **equipped** for every good work, but for **all of us** to be equipped through the writings of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.

What Paul is saying in these two verses is that the Bible alone is **sufficient or adequate** to provide you and me with **everything** we need for **every good work** we do. I do not need, and you do not need, some **additional prophecy** from any “man of God” to help you get through life today, tomorrow, or the rest of your life. All you need is right here in the Bible which is **illumined by the Holy Spirit** who lives in **every** believer, not just the self-proclaimed “man of God”. Jesus told the apostles, and by extension, the whole church throughout history,

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18 NAU)

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, **He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13 NAU)

The phrase “what is to come” does not primarily refer to predictions of the future, even though John in Revelation sees future events. We have only one book of this sort in the NT. The phrase, “what is to come” was **additional teaching that the Holy Spirit would give the apostles** concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ and instructions about living the Christian life. Other books in the NT, the **gospels**, give us information about the ministry of Christ as well as the history of the early church, the Acts of the Apostles. The rest of the books, the **epistles,** specifically give us additional Christian doctrine and how this doctrine is applied to our lives. But **all** the books of the NT, including the gospels, Acts, and Revelation have the **primary purpose** of instructing us about how to live the Christian life for the glory of God.

Well, you may be thinking, the Holy Spirit was given to the **apostles** to lead **them** into the truth, but not the **average believer**. But Jesus says in the Great Commission, “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus was not saying that He would only be with the apostles through the Holy Spirit, but with every believer. The apostles would not live to the end of the age; they would die before the end of the age arrived. You and I will also probably die before the end of the age, but we have the promise of Jesus that He will always be with the church until the end of the age. How? Through the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells in **every believer** and who helps **every believer** understand what he reads in the Scriptures. Although the Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles in a **very special way to receive the additional revelation** Jesus wanted to teach them, He is also given to every believer to understand this additional revelation.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone **does not have the Spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to Him. (Romans 8:9 NAU)

In other words, if you don’t have the Holy Spirit, you are not a true believer; you are not a Christian. Every Christian does not receive the words of God directly from the Holy Spirit, but every Christian is **led** by the Holy Spirit as he reads God’s word.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit** you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a **spirit of adoption** as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The **Spirit Himself** testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. (Romans 8:11-17 NAU)

We can see from this passage that there is **no special group** of Christians who have the Holy Spirit as opposed to other **average Christians like you and me** who do not have the Holy Spirit. If we do not have the Holy Spirit, we are not Christians at all. Moreover, all who are true believers are **being led** by the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit lead us? By telling us new prophecies and predictions of the future? No. He is helping us **to put to death the deeds of the flesh**—lying, anger, sexual immorality, greed, jealousy, covetousness, theft, laziness, and every other sin. But if we are not being **led by the Spirit** in putting to death the deeds of the flesh, we **must die—**that is, we must reap the consequences of a spiritual death in hell.Why must we die? Because we show by our ungodly lives that we are not being led by the Spirit and do not have the Holy Spirit. We are still unbelievers.

Many of the people **claiming to be prophets in your country and mine** are not being led by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the flesh. They are sexually immoral, sleeping with multiple women to whom they are not married; they are greedy, feeding off the ignorance of people who foolishly believe everything they say; they are lazy, never studying the Bible but claiming that God gives them what they need whenever they get up to speak. And their laziness is obvious to anyone who knows the Bible since **their sermons have no substance and no content**; they consist of shouting and dancing, but there is **nothing there from the scriptures** helping me or you to live our lives as a faithful Christians.

**It can be demonstrated almost without exception** that wherever you see pastors who are claiming to receive direct revelation from God, there is (1) no emphasis at all on the teaching of the Bible, (2) they teach many things contrary to what the Bible teaches (Grudem, p. 132), and (3) many of these men are living immoral lives.

I don’t think I need to remind you—but I will remind you—of what happened right here in Kanungu about 15 years ago. A man claiming to be a prophet told other Christians that Christ was coming on a certain day. Many such days passed without Christ coming. Many believed him for a while until it was clear that Christ was not coming. Then, as a last effort, he lured his followers into the church building and burned the church down on top of them. (Did I hear this story correctly?) You can see that believing a **lying prophet** can be dangerous not only spiritually but physically. **If a Christian had been reading his Bible** during that time, or if he had been **listening to preachers who were faithful** to the word of God, they would never have listened to this false prophet. What did Jesus say about trying determine when He was returning at the end of the age?

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and **what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** (Matthew 24:3 NAU)

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. 36 "**But of that day and hour no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, **nor the Son, but the Father alone**. 37 "For **the coming of the Son of Man** will be just like the days of Noah. 38 "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. 42 "Therefore be on the alert, **for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.** (Matthew 24:35-42 NAU)

If Jesus did not know when He was returning, how can **anyone else** know when He is returning? Speaking to the apostles, He said, “You do not know which day your Lord is coming.” But in addition to this, Jesus explicitly said that **no one** knows the day or the hour of His return. Instead, as Christians, we must all be alert and prepared for His return. If the people who died in Kanungu had understood this passage, they would have known that this prophet in Kanungu was a **false** prophet. But they did not know that because they were ignorant of what the Bible said. Had they studied their Bibles, or if they had been taught by faithful preachers, they would not have died that day in Kanungu.

**But there are other errors** that are being taught by false prophets—errors that pertain to living the Christian life. I am reminded of a young woman in Canada or the US (I don’t remember which) who was seduced by her pastor, twice her age, to have sex with him because “sexual sin did not apply to him.” He was an apostle, he said, and he lived at a higher level than everyone else. This man had repeated sex with this young woman for nine years until he was exposed. Both he and she are guilty, but **he** most of all. I think he was married, so she is guilty of sexual adultery and for being spiritually stupid and ignorant. She should have known that a true apostle would not ask her to violate the word of God. He is guilty of sexual adultery and rape and, worst of all, **speaking false words in the name of God.**

Christians in Uganda are being deceived and led astray by men like this. So let’s look at the gift of prophecy in the Bible.

**1. The gift of prophecy in the OT (Deuteronomy 18)**

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses gives these instructions to the nation of Israel.

"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. 10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses **divination**, one who practices **witchcraft**, or one who interprets omens, or a **sorcerer**, 11 or one who **casts a spell**, or a **medium**, or a **spiritist**, or one who **calls up the dead**. 12 "For whoever does these things is **detestable** to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. 13 "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. 14 "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, **listen to those who practice witchcraft** and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you *to do* so. 15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a **prophet like me** from among you, from your countrymen, **you shall listen to him**….18 'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and **I will put My words** in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 'It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. 20 'But **the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak**, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing **does not come about** or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:9-22 NAU)

Do you recognize any of these people? Do you know any **mediums** between the dead and the living, do you know anyone who **calls up the dead**, do you know anyone who **casts a spell** or curse upon other people, any who **practice witchcraft**? God says that such people are **“detestable”** to Him. **God despises these people.** And you had better stay away from people like this. If you don’t, God is going to despise you as well, and you will get what you deserve, eternal suffering in hell. Choose this day whom you will serve. You can serve Christ or you can serve your African tribal gods and religions, but you cannot serve both. So make your choice.

Several things about this passage should be emphasized:

**(1)** **First,** the practice of using diviners, spiritists, those who practiced witchcraft, those who communicated with the dead, was a form of determining the **will of a god** or the **gods** among pagan peoples in the OT. God said to His people, “You can’t do that.” **There is only one legitimate way that you can determine what my will is for your life—My Word.** But how were the people supposed to know this word? They did not have a written Bible, but God had already raised up a prophet for Israel—the man **Moses**. Moses received communication from God face to face. Moreover, God would later communicate His will through **other OT prophets** through dreams and visions, but not face to face like He did with Moses. In this sense, Moses was greater than any other prophet of the OT. But God would **finally communicate His will** through another Prophet **like Moses** who had an even closer face to face relationship with God than Moses had—**Jesus Christ**. Preaching about Christ in Acts 3, Peter says to the Jews,

"Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. 23 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' 24 "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, also announced these days. (Acts 3:22-24 NAU)

All the prophets of the OT, including Moses, **point to Jesus the Prophet** who was greater than Moses. In the book of Hebrews, the writer says,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days **has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2 NAU)

The revelation of the prophets in the OT was a **partial** revelation, but the revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh recorded in the gospels was a **final** revelation. The **remainder** of the revelation of Christ and His work was provided in the **writings of the apostles in the NT**. In these writings, nothing essentially new is given concerning the person and work of Christ. Rather, the apostles **continue to explain** the **final revelation** of Christ and its many applications to the life of the church. Therefore, “Nothing can be added to Christ’s redemptive work, and nothing can be added to the revelation of that redemptive work” that has not already been given to us in the NT. “Once **that redemption** is finished, and the **apostolic testimony to it is finished**, the Scriptures are complete, and **we should expect no** more additions to them” (Frame, p. 227). In other words, I don’t need any more revelation of Jesus Christ and His work other than what I already have in the Scriptures.

The same thing Paul says in 2 Tim. 3: 16-17 is also said by Peter in a different way.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us **everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the **true knowledge of Him** who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of *the* divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:2-4 NAU)

By the words, “partakers of the divine nature”, Peter was **not saying that we become gods**—something the Mormons teach—but that we partake of the **moral character** of Jesus Christ by paying attention to “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” that we find in the Scriptures.

Now, getting back to the passage in Deuteronomy 18.

**(2)** **Second,** in the OT, a prophet who makes a prediction that **does not come true** is a false **prophet,** and the Israelites did not need to listen to them. Moses was not talking about averages or percentages. He did not say, “Well, everyone has a bad day once in a while, so if the prophet is true 70% of the time, or even 60% of the time, he is a true prophet.” No. Moses didn’t say that. If the prophet is receiving communication from God, then his prophecy is accurate **all** of the time, not **some** of the time. God knows the future **all the time** because He ordained the future, declaring the end from the beginning. He never makes an inaccurate statement about anything, including the future; and if God is telling **you** what He knows about the future, then **you will not make a mistake**. If you do make a mistake, God has not spoken to you. The **OT prophets** recorded in the Bible were accurate 100% of the time because they were getting their information **from God**—not their own imaginations. There is a story in 1 Kings 22 about Micaiah the prophet. We don’t have time for the story, but Micaiah predicted that wicked King Ahab would not return alive from the battle with the Syrians. But King Ahab didn’t believe him. When Ahab was leaving for the battle he told the servants to lock Micaiah in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until he returned safely. Micaiah heard the king’s words, and here is what said:

…"If you indeed return safely **the LORD has not spoken by me**." And he said, "Listen, all you people." (1 Kings 22:28 NAU)

In other words, Micaiah was subjecting himself to the test of a true prophet. If his words did not come true, he was not a true prophet. The end of the story is that Ahab dies in battle just as Micaiah says he would.

We have another story in the Bible in Jeremiah 28 about a false prophet named **Hananiah** who prophesied that Judah would return from Babylonian captivity in two years. This was in direct contradiction to the prophecy of Jeremiah who said that Judah would remain in Babylonian captivity for **70 years**. Jeremiah takes Hananiah aside and says to him, “You are a false prophet, and you are leading the men of Judah astray. For this sin, you are going to die within one year.” And Hananiah dies within the year just as Jeremiah had said—proving that Hananiah was a false prophet and Jeremiah was a true prophet.

**I hope the prophets here in Kanungu are paying attention.** Those who **claim** to be prophets of the Lord should **beware**. If God has not really spoken through you, then you are leading God’s people astray; and, therefore, **you are heaping future judgment** on yourself. God did not say that all false prophets would die in one year. Jeremiah said this about Hananiah, no one else. Your judgment—whatever it is—may come **much sooner or much later**, but it will come because you have dared to say, “Thus says the Lord” when God did not speak to you.

But you may say, “Oh, but I don’t use the prophetic formula in the OT. I never say, **“Thus says the Lord.”** I only say, **“God told me.”** But could someone here explain to me the difference between “thus says the Lord” and “God told me”? I personally don’t see the difference. Now if you wish to say, **“I sense in my heart that God is telling me…”** to do this or that, or **“I believe that the Holy Spirit is indicating to me that you…”** should do this or that, I have no problem with this. You are only giving an opinion based on a hunch, and you would probably admit that you were not absolutely sure about your hunch. You are not saying that you **absolutely know** that God is saying one thing or another. If Samuel, whom I know, had some feeling from the Holy Spirit which he shared with me about my life, I would listen to him carefully. But if Samuel said to me, “God told me to tell you that He wants you to move to Saudi Arabia and be a missionary.” I would tell him, “Well, that is a funny thing, because God did not tell me this; and I think I would rather live in Uganda.”

Nevertheless, I certainly believe in the ongoing, **inward promptings** of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every Christian whereby the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to **encourage** us to do something which pleases God or to **discourage** us from doing something which dishonors God. I believe the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and inward corruption. **Every Christian should experience these inner promptings and convictions of the Spirit.** God is active in working with His people. He did not stop communicating with His people after the first century.

I believed the Lord was leading me through the Spirit to speak at this conference. I could have refused Samuel’s invitation, but the Spirit led me to come. God didn’t audibly tell me to come, and I did not get any visions. I am not saying, “**God told me** to be here.” Yet, I believe the Holy Spirit **led me** to be here. The Spirit also **led me** to spend the next two full weeks following Samuel’s invitation **to study and prepare** for this conference. I do not expect the Holy Spirit to tell me what to say the moment I get up here in front of you. I have spent over 100 hours preparing for this **with the help of the Holy Spirit**.

I have the suspicion that some of this “God told me” business on the part of many pastors is a **cover-up for their own laziness.** The pastors who claim to get their sermons **from God** the moment they step up in the pulpit are just **too lazy to spend 20 hours the previous week** reading and studying what God has **already said** in the Bible. While they claim to love God’s word, they actually **despise** God’s word because they seldom ever read it, much less study it. But I am curious to know from these preachers **why they should presume** the Holy Spirit to give them His words the very moment they begin preaching when they ignore what the Spirit said to the inspired prophets and apostles for the 1500 years the Bible was being written. Why should the Holy Spirit give you new words when you despise the old words?

Writing to Timothy, Paul emphasizes the need to handle accurately the word of truth.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 NAU)

What was the word of truth Timothy was supposed to handle accurately? It was the only **written** word of God at the time, the OT. But now we have also the NT, and we must handle this word of God accurately, as well. Now, if Timothy was exhorted by Paul to study and to be responsible in his handling of the word, what does that say about modern preachers?

**(3) Third**, the passage in Deuteronomy says that **God will put His words** in the mouth of the true prophet. Moreover, the prophet must speak **only** what the Lord commanded him to speak. Obviously, God would never give him something to say that **contradicted** what God had **already** said. **God never contradicts Himself.**

Moreover, if the prophet attempts to **lure the Israelites into the worship of a false god**, then they would know that this was a false prophet. This condition for prophecy is included in the phrase, “speaks in the name of other gods” (v. 20). So, if a prophet contradicted the word of the Lord previously given, he was a false prophet **no matter what he did**. Even if he predicted signs and wonders that came true, the people of Israel **should not listen to him** because he had violated the previous words of God. It did not matter whether these **signs and wonders** had actually occurred or whether they were by trickery or slight of hand; the important thing is that they appeared to everyone to be true. But true or not, the prophets **words** were not true; therefore, he was a false prophet.

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and **gives you a sign or a wonder**, 2 and the sign or the wonder **comes true**, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after **other gods** (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' 3 you **shall not listen** to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is **testing you** to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NAU)

So we see here that Deuteronomy 13 supplements what is said about the false prophet in Deuteronomy 18. A false prophet is a prophet who…

(1) Predicts something that **does not come true**

(2) Predicts signs and wonders that **do come true,** but he also **tempts Israel to worship false gods.** In other words, although his signs and wonders come true, his **words** are not true.

(3) Prophesies words that God did not command him to speak, words which, by deduction, **contradict what God has already said.**

Notice also **that God allows** a false prophet to appear before Israel and produce signs and wonders which come true **so that He can test Israel to see if they love Him**. This is an interesting statement in the context of sub-Saharan Africa with **so many professing Christians resorting to African tribal religions.** What do you do when your crops don’t grow or when your child gets sick? You pray, and then you get your pastor and other Christians to pray for your crops or your child. What do you do if your crops **still don’t grow** or your child is **still sick**? Do you go to the **witch doctor and sacrifice to your dead ancestors?** And what happens if your crops then grow or your child gets well? What have you proved? Have you proved that the ancestral spirits and the witch doctor are more powerful than God? Is that what you have proved? No. This passage shows that **sometimes God allowed false prophets to perform signs and wonders** that came true, but that they entice people to worship false gods through their wonders. Jesus Himself even said that **false Christs** would arise in the last days and would deceive, if possible, even the elect.

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and **will show great signs and wonders**, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:23-24 NAU)

So what have you proved by going to the witch doctor and getting what you wanted—healthy crops and healthy children? **You have proved that you don’t love God.** The only thing you want from God are material things—healthy children, healthy crops, and money. If you don’t get these things from God, you will get them somewhere else. But who do you think allowed you to get what you wanted? Do you think the witch doctor can do anything for you without God’s permission? If you think he is more powerful, you need to read the book of Job where Satan must ask God’s permission for everything he does to Job. Satan can’t do a thing without God’s permission. So what you proved is that you don’t love God and you do not respect God for being God.

**As we read the OT prophets**, we find that they don’t spend much time predicting future events or performing miracles. The main future event which they do predict is the destruction of certain countries—including Israel and Judah—for violating the Law of God given to them in the Pentateuch, including those in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Therefore, **the prophets of the OT were constantly bringing Israel and Judah back to the Law of God and commanding them to repent for breaking His moral law.**

But I find it interesting that the self-proclaimed prophets in Uganda have **little or no interest in explaining the word of God.** They do not do **exegesis** which means the **critical analysis** of the Bible. They don’t even know what the word, “exegesis” means. Rather, they are only interested in telling people the next thing that pops into their heads. It would not matter to me if they can heal the sick—and I am convinced that few, if **any** of them, can—because they do not explain the word of God.

**2. The gift of prophecy in the New Testament**

Wayne Grudem has this definition of NT prophecy:

*[New Testament prophecy]* should be defined not as “predicting the future,” nor as “proclaiming a word from the Lord,” nor as “powerful preaching”—but rather as *“telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”*