

Who is The Final Authority?

Before we begin our examination of specific Roman Catholic doctrines, we must determine who will be the final authority.

Here we encounter our first major discrepancy. The Bible maintains that *it* is the one and only final authority, while Catholicism teaches that three final authorities exist. The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares:

“It is clear therefore that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way, under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.” (Pg. 29, #95)

According to this passage, the Scriptures, church tradition (teachings handed down through the ages), and the Magisterium (the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God) are all equal in importance. (See also Pg. 25, #82.)

According to Catholic doctrine, church tradition and the magisterium are just as much the Word of God as are the written Scriptures:

“Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And (Holy) Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit.” (Pg. 26, #81)

The obvious question is, what happens when these three “final authorities” disagree with each other? The Catechism gives this answer:

“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.” (Pg. 27, #85)

It is important to note that when the Catechism explains that the task of interpreting the Word of God was entrusted to the “Church,” it is referring exclusively to the

Roman Catholic church. Such is the case throughout the Catechism. “The Church” always refers to the Roman Catholic church.

The Catechism repeats the same doctrine using different words:

“For, of course, all that has been said about the manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God.” (Pg. 34, #119)

Therefore, the Catechism concludes that the one final authority is not the Bible, but the current teaching of the Catholic church, since she is the only one qualified to provide an “authentic interpretation” of God’s Word.

Does the Bible agree?

If the Bible, tradition and the teachings of the Catholic church are all, in fact, the Word of God, then the Bible will concur with this teaching. Unfortunately for Catholicism, it does not. In fact, quite the contrary is true. God declares in the Bible that His written Word always has been, and always will be—perfect:

“Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”
Psalm 119: 160

“The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.” Psalm 12:6-7

The Bible boldly declares that it is the only final authority:

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” John 17:17

In the book of Revelation, God delivers this blistering warning about tampering with His written Word:

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Revelation 22:18-19

The Apostle Paul advises Bible readers how they should react to those who teach doctrines contrary to God's written Word:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned*; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” Romans 16:17-18

Paul admonishes true believers to avoid anyone who teaches doctrines contrary to the written Scriptures. He also reveals the consequences of believing such false teachings:

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach *any* other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, *let him be accursed*.” Galatians 1:8

Then Paul immediately repeats himself:

“As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach *any* other gospel unto you than that ye have received, *let him be accursed*.” Galatians 1:9

Thus, when Catholic doctrine contradicts God's written Word, those who side against the Holy Scriptures will be “accursed.”

The writer of Proverbs delivers the same stern warning to anyone who would dare change the written Word of God:

“Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. *Add thou not unto his words*, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” Proverbs 30:5-6

God's Word is settled forever

God pronounces that His Word was written once and has been forever settled:

“*For ever*, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” Psalm 119:89

“But the word of the Lord endureth *for ever*...” 1 Peter 1:25

“... the word of our God shall stand *for ever*.” Isaiah 40:8

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth *for ever*.” 1 Peter 1:23

God’s Word is perfect

God’s Word can’t change because it’s perfect just the way it is:

“The law of the LORD is *perfect*, converting the soul...” Psalm 19:7

Catholicism claims that only the leadership of the Catholic church can properly interpret the written Word, but the Bible disagrees:

“... no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” 2 Peter 1:21

Where does God want people to obtain their doctrine... from a priest—or from the Bible?

“All *scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:”
2 Timothy 3:16

Paul is not alluding to the magisterium or church tradition here because the previous verse reads:

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15

Since the Catholic church was not yet in existence when Paul penned these words, he could not have been referring to the teachings of Catholicism.

Did God give away His authority?

As these and hundreds of other scripture verses make plain, God never gave anyone the authority to add to or change His Word. It’s perfect and complete, just as He wrote it.

One of the first questions you must answer for yourself is, “Did God violate all these Scriptures by giving the pope and the Catholic church the right to change His Word, though He said He never would?”

The Pharisees

While Jesus walked the earth, He publicly rebuked the Pharisees, the religious leaders of his day:

“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men...” Mark 7:7-8

Jesus was upset that the Pharisees had elevated their tradition above God’s Word because He knows that the Word of God leads people to eternal life, while the traditions of men lead people to eternal destruction.

Though these religious leaders obeyed all the rules of their religion, look what Jesus said awaited them:

“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the ***damnation of hell?***” Matthew 23:33

When the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples transgressed the traditions of the elders, Jesus answered them with a question of His own:

“Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” Matthew 15:3

Jesus always elevated the Scriptures above traditions:

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing ***the scriptures***, nor the power of God.” Matthew 22:29

God’s unchanging Word has always been the final authority, never the traditions of men:

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, ***after the tradition of men***, after the rudiments of the world, ***and not after Christ.***” Colossians 2:8

Christians in New Testament times knew what the final authority was:

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and ***searched the scriptures daily***, whether those things were so.” Acts 17:11

To determine if what they had heard was true, these people went to the final authority, the written Scriptures. Jesus says of His Words:

“... If a man love me, he will keep *my words*: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. *He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings...*” John 14:23-24

Consider these words from the Apostle Paul:

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, *the word of God...*” 1 Thessalonians 2:13

When Paul preached the Word of God to these people, it was not Catholic doctrine because Catholicism didn't exist yet.

Conclusion

God doesn't change (Malachi 3:6) because He is perfect. His Son, Jesus, doesn't change (Hebrews 13:8) because He is perfect. Why, then, should God's perfect Word keep changing?

As you read the remainder of this book, you will be forced to decide which you believe is the final authority: God's written Word, or the teachings and traditions of the Catholic church.

Your decision will become critical as you discover that God's Word and the teachings of Catholicism are diametrically opposed on every doctrine we will examine.

Will you side with the words of God or the traditions of men?

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *my words* shall not pass away.” Matthew 24:35

Note: Since the written Scriptures plainly state that they alone are the Word of God, for the remainder of this book, all references to the Word of God or God's Word will refer to the written Scriptures only, not the traditions of the Catholic church or the magisterium.

“... let God be true, but every man a liar...” Romans 3:4