

On Whose Authority?

Q. What authority from God directs us how to glorify and enjoy Him?

A. The only authority for glorifying and enjoying Him is the Bible, which is the word of God and is made up of the Old and New Testaments.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism #2)

“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)

Recently I had the opportunity to sit down with a very good friend of mine who is a devoted Roman Catholic, in order to discuss certain issues about theology. We had gone out to breakfast together, and I was interested in hearing my friend’s opinion on a particular doctrine that I had discovered was present in Roman Catholic theology that I was hoping he could explain/clarify for me. After I had finished asking my questions, my friend told me that he wasn’t exactly sure about what the official Roman Catholic teaching was on that particular subject, and so he informed me that he would be sure to speak with his local priest about the issue, and then get back to me with the answer.

About a week went by, after which I received an email from my friend. In it, he forwarded me to the official website of the Roman Catholic church, to a page that was designed to answer my question directly. When the webpage loaded up, I was shocked as to what I found. Or perhaps, I was shocked more because of what I DIDN’T find. What I found was a list of quotes from various Popes from centuries past speaking about this particular teaching. What I DIDN’T find, was any reference to the Bible whatsoever. There were no Bible verses to back up this Roman Catholic doctrine. There were no Bible proof-texts to show how they arrived at their conclusion.

Perhaps you’ve had a run in with this type of issue with some of your Roman Catholic friends and family members. Or maybe you yourself grew up in a Roman Catholic church and you are all too familiar with this issue. What we need to understand is that Protestants and Roman Catholics have a very different understanding when it comes to the issue of ultimate AUTHORITY. The English word “*authority*” is defined in this way: “*Authority is that which has the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.*”

Historically, Protestants have held to a doctrine known as “*Sola Scriptura*” which teaches that Scripture and Scripture alone is our highest authority. To confess the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is to declare that although we acknowledge that there are many types of authority figures in our lives (*parents, employers, presidents, pastors, etc.*) ultimately none of these authorities are the utmost

authority in our lives. The highest and final authority for the Christian is the Word of God. We believe along with the Apostle Paul that, *“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).

Roman Catholics on the other hand hold to what is known as a *“dual-source”* of authority. They will affirm that the Bible is their highest authority...*yet at the same time*...they will affirm that church tradition is ALSO their highest authority. In practicality, that means that for the Roman Catholic, the Pope’s authority can (*and at many times does*) supersede the authority of the Scriptures. Since the middle ages, the Roman Catholic church has taught what is known in Latin as *“fides implicita”* or an *“implicit faith”*, wherein a Catholic is to believe whatever the Roman Church declares, even if they haven’t been convinced themselves by the Scriptures.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism draws a powerful line in the sand on the issue of ultimate authority when it comes to the Christian life by stating: *“The **only** authority for glorifying and enjoying Him is the Bible, which is the word of God and is made up of the Old and New Testaments.”* What about you? What’s your highest authority? Is it God’s Word? Or is it something or someone else?

Dig Even Deeper into God’s Word!

2 Peter 1:20-21

Deuteronomy 4:2

Psalm 19:7-11

Acts 17:11