

Scripture and Tradition
A Lutheran Understanding of “Scripture Alone” (*Sola Scriptura*)
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A. Introduction

1. The Reformers’ Concern: Increasing Diminution of the Voice of the Scriptures
 - a. Obscuring Scriptures’ Voice
 - i. Ideas from developing traditions had gained prominence.
 - ii. Pronouncements from authorities seemed alien to Scripture’s content.
 - b. Stifling Scriptures’ Voice
 - i. Access to the Scriptures had become limited.
 - ii. Interpretations were increasingly restricted to the church’s Magisterium.
2. Reason for Concern: The apostolic message of the free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ seemed to be obscured when the voice of the Scriptures was diminished.

B. Basic Reformation Understanding the Scriptures and their Importance

1. The apostles were the fully-empowered (“plenipotentiary”) ambassadors of our Lord. See especially Luke 10:16a and 2 Corinthians 5:20, 13:10.
2. As such, the apostles and their proclamation/teaching were and are the foundation of Christ’s church. See **1 John 1:1-3**.

NB: This passage shows the critical orientation: **key** is the proclamation/teaching of the apostles, the authoritative eyewitnesses. Those who are Christians are to believe their word and (so) be in fellowship with them (and through them with God). (See also Ephesians 2:20.)

3. This authoritative proclamation/teaching was given by the apostles either in person or through their writings. See 2 Thessalonians 2:5 and Galatians 1:1-2 (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:10).
4. For those among whom an apostle was not physically present, the authoritative, apostolic testimony was to be found in the apostles’ writings. See Colossians 4:16, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and John 20:31 (cf. John 21:24).
5. Therefore, as the repository of the voice of the (absent) apostles, **the sacred Scriptures are the source and norm of Christian faith and life**, especially for succeeding generations.

C. What This Does **Not** Mean

1. This does **not** mean that there is no place other than the Scriptures that apostolic proclamation/teaching can be found. In fact, the so-called *regulae fidei* (“rules of faith”) of the earliest Christian communities also preserve apostolic doctrine. (See D 1 a, below.)

2. This also does **not** mean that the Scriptures are a self-contained unit, in such a way that no other book/resource is to be used in their interpretation. Dictionaries, grammars, etc., aid in understanding what the books are saying and do not determine its content. The *regulae fidei* (see C 1, above) also serve an interpretive function (see D 1 b, below).

D. The Reformation Understanding of Tradition and Scripture

1. The *Regulae Fidei*

a. Nature

As noted above, the “rules of faith” (also) preserve the apostolic proclamation and teaching. These *regulae* are local creeds (virtually proto-Apostles Creeds), drawn from both the oral proclamation of the apostles and the Scriptures. They are, thus, congruent with the apostolic Scriptures and probably represent something like the “prescribed form/standard of teaching” Paul mentions in Romans 6:17.

The *regulae* are not, however, the equal of the Scriptures in at least two respects. First, each *regula* was a local creedal expression and was not universally confessed, as were/are the Scriptures. Second, the *regulae* are extremely limited in scope, providing (only) a basic skeleton, as it were, of the Christian faith.

b. Functions

The *regulae*, however, did/do perform two important and helpful functions.

- i. They aid in the interpretation of the Scriptures.

- i. They aid in the identification of boundaries of the Scriptures.

2. Difference to the Roman Catholic Understanding of Tradition

E. Final Statement of Reformation Understanding of Scripture and Tradition

In the sacred Scriptures we hear—and we can be sure that we hear—the true, authoritative voice of the apostles. This voice declares to us the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus and gives us fellowship with God in Christ. Hence, the Reformation allegiance to “Scripture alone” (*sola Scriptura*).