

A reply to the article...
"THE BIBLE ALONE?"

INTRODUCTION: A short article titled "*The Bible Alone?*" appeared in the Papua New Guinea "*Post Courier*" newspaper 2-3 decades ago. In it Roman Catholic apologists appealed to several Bible verses including a statement made by the apostle Paul ("*...stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*" - **2 Thess. 2:15**) to try to support the Roman Catholic doctrine that *church tradition* is equal with Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that statements &/or teachings by popes & church councils (often added hundreds of years later), are to be accorded equal status with biblical statements and teachings. I believe the Roman Catholic authors of that article (an organization called "*Catholic Answers*," based in San Diego, California) took that verse completely out of context. So in this short paper I would like to demonstrate by a comparison of Roman Catholic teachings with the Bible, that Roman Catholicism actually *contradicts* this very command of Paul's to which they appeal!

FIRSTLY: Please note that in **2 Thess. 2:15** Paul was referring to things *he had taught the Thessalonian believers either verbally or in writing*. He was definitely not referring to teachings & traditions invented hundreds of years later!

SECONDLY: It can be demonstrated that the Roman Catholic Church for centuries has actually *violated Paul's commands-rather than following the "traditions" which he taught!* Here are a few examples:

- a) **ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH GOVERNMENT & POLITY.** When you compare the Roman Catholic system of church government (e.g. a Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops, etc.) with Paul's "*traditions*" in 1 and 2 Timothy & Titus, you find none of those positions or titles mentioned. Please keep in mind that those books are where Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote down God's divine pattern and instructions for *church polity & government*.
- b) **THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL & WAY OF SALVATION.** In **1 Cor. 1:14-17** Paul makes it clear that "*the gospel*" (i.e. the way of salvation and cleansing from sin), is totally separate from baptism. According to Paul, baptism clearly is NOT a part of the gospel, nor is it a way to have sins forgiven. Yet the Roman Catholic Church teaches that at baptism an infant is cleansed from original sin. Clearly, Catholicism is *not* following Paul's "*traditions*" in doing so! (cf. **Heb. 9:22**)
- c) **THE TEACHING THAT MARY IS CO-MEDIATRIX WITH CHRIST & AN OBJECT OF PRAYER.** While Catholicism teaches that the faithful should pray to Mary, and that she can intercede & act as a mediator for us, Paul in his "*traditions*" clearly teaches otherwise! In **1 Tim. 2:5** he makes it clear that we have only one mediator: Jesus Christ-not Mary!
- d) **THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY OF MARY.** The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary remained a virgin throughout the remainder of her life and completely abstained from sexual relations with her husband Joseph. But Paul in his "*traditions*" taught that for Mary to do so would have actually been sin. Paul taught in **1 Cor. 7:1-5** that married couples should not abstain from sexual relations except for brief periods for special prayer and/or fasting. For Mary to have remained a virgin throughout her married life would have violated Paul's command! (Incidentally, Mary & Joseph had a number of children, as evidenced by the biblical references to Jesus' brothers. The RCC explanation that these individuals were only "*cousins*" is simply false. There is a Greek word for cousin, but the word for brother is used, not cousin!).
- e) **THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY.** This teaching of Roman Catholicism has nothing to do with the sinlessness of Christ. Rather it is the idea that Mary was supposedly sinless from her mother's womb and remained sinless throughout her life. However Paul's "*traditions*" are quite the opposite. In **Romans 3:10-12, 23** he teaches that *ALL* men & women apart from Christ are sinners! In Ephesians 2:1 he depicts mankind as "*dead in trespasses and sins.*" That includes Mary. And interestingly, Mary herself confessed that she was a sinner declaring in **Luke 1:47** "*my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*" Only *sinners* need a savior!

f) **CONFESSION TO PRIESTS**. Paul taught, as noted above, that believers have direct access to God through Jesus Christ & His righteousness. There is *no need* for another mediator on earth or in heaven. Christ is our high priest (**Heb. 9 & 10**)! In addition the Bible also teaches that *EVERY* true believer is a priest (**Rev. 1:6**), so we certainly don't need another one. Note too when Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven it caused some of the Jewish religious leaders to react, because they, like everyone else, understood that only God can forgive sins! (**Mk. 2:7**). So priests have no ability to do so.

g) **THE FORBIDDING OF MARRIAGE &/or FOODS**. For centuries the Roman Catholic Church forbade the eating of meat on Fridays. Even to this day they do not allow priests to marry. This too contradicts Paul's "*traditions*," since he stated that such regulations as forbidding marriage or certain foods was a mark of false teachers! (**1 Tim. 4:1-3**).

h) **SALVATION BY WORKS**. While the Roman Catholic Church will often declare that salvation is obtained by grace, it is actually a grace that they believe is obtained through a series of *good deeds & acts* performed by the individual i.e. works. For centuries the RCC has taught that meritorious works are possible by man, and that the seven sacraments (which are really works, i.e. man's efforts) are channels of grace or merit. By contrast, Paul's traditions were very different. He declared that a person can do nothing good that can help him earn salvation (e.g. **Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:1-14; Titus 3:5**; etc.).

i) **PURGATORY**. Paul knew nothing of Purgatory, a word which occurs nowhere in the Bible or the Apocrypha! Instead Paul taught the believers in Corinth that true Christians will be judged regarding the obtaining of rewards or a loss thereof (crowns, etc.) at the "*judgment seat of Christ*" (**1 Cor. 3:5-16; 2 Cor. 5:10**). But that judgment has *absolutely nothing* to do with salvation or getting to heaven (**1 Cor. 3:15**). Rather it is a place where those who are Christians will obtain rewards that they will subsequently be able to present to Jesus as a small thank you to Him, for all He has done for them (**Rev. 4:4 cf. 10**).

j) **EMPHASIS & CELEBRATION OF SPECIAL "DAYS"**. Catholicism esteems & marks certain days for prescribed activities & behaviors. But Paul's "*traditions*" included the fact that a believer is no longer under the law, nor is he bound by certain "holy" days, etc. (e.g. **Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-17**).

k) **CHURCH FUNDING PRACTICES**. Paul's teachings ("*traditions*") regarding financial matters leave no place whatsoever for gambling (e.g. "*Bingo*"), church raffles, begging, or any other type of worldly monetary solicitation to assist God's work. Instead, free, joyful, sacrificial giving was prescribed by him to meet church financial needs (**2 Cor. 8-9**)!

l) **EUCCHARIST (i.e. COMMUNION, or "THE LORD'S SUPPER")**. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that during communion the bread and wine, by an act called "*transubstantiation*," becomes the literal body and blood of Christ. However that is contradictory to Paul's "*tradition*" since he said that the bread & juice was *symbolic* ("*...the Lord Jesus... said... 'do this in remembrance of me...'*" for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." - **1 Cor. 11:23-26**). A careful reading of **John 6:25-72** will also show the RCC teaching to be in error on this point.

m) **EVOLUTION OR EVE?** The RCC in 1996 officially endorsed and approved the theory of evolution. The Pope maintains that evolution is compatible with the Bible. But Paul in his writings maintained that there was a *real* Adam and Eve (**Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Tim. 2:13-15**), and that "*the woman is from the man*" (**1 Cor. 11:8**) which would be an impossible statement if evolution were true.

n) **ALLEGIANCE TO GOVERNMENT**. It is a little known fact that Roman Catholic priests and nuns swear their highest allegiance to the Pope and the RCC. Thus if an earthly government and the Vatican government conflict, Catholics are expected to obey the Roman Catholic Church. Paul taught differently. He said that believers are to be in subjection to governments unless they directly contradict God's will as revealed in His Word (**Rom. 13:1-7**).

o) **WAS PETER REALLY THE FIRST POPE?** It is apparent from Paul's writings (**2 Cor. 11:5; Gal. 2:11-21**) that he never felt that Peter was above anyone else. Paul certainly didn't feel that he himself was behind or beneath Peter in any way (**2 Cor. 12:11**). In fact, Paul says he publicly rebuked Peter on one occasion (**Gal.**

2:11-ff). Furthermore, at the famous Jerusalem council (**Acts 15:13-22**) James, not Peter, was the apparent leader and had the final say. Note also that Peter called himself a "*fellow elder*" (i.e. fellow pastor), not "Pope" or anything else (**1 Pet. 5:1**). Earlier in his first epistle, Peter made it quite clear that it was Christ, not himself, who was the foundation of the church (**1 Pet. 2:4-8** [note the interesting interplay of the term "*stone*" i.e. "*rock*" throughout his discussion there]. Paul's "*traditions*" also clearly establish Christ as the foundation of the church, not Peter (**1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20**).

THIRDLY, the Roman Catholic Church doesn't follow the "*traditions*" of other New Testament writers either-including Peter! For example:

a) **THE MASS**. The Mass in the Roman Catholic Church is basically a re-sacrifice of Christ. The official teaching is that at every Mass Christ's body and blood become miraculously present, and His body is broken once again. It is called an unbloody sacrifice which, nonetheless, is the same sacrifice as that of the cross. By comparison, the writer of Hebrews dogmatically states under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that Christ was offered once and for all, and that the work He performed is *finished* and *is not*, and *cannot* be repeated (**Heb. 9:12-14, 22; 10:1-2, 10-14**). In **John 19:30** Christ said His work was "*finished*" (literally, "*paid in full.*")!

b) **ASSURANCE OF SALVATION**. Catholicism teaches that no one can be absolutely assured that they will go to heaven. Furthermore, most teach and/or believe that they will have to spend some time in purgatory. Over against this idea John wrote in his first epistle that a person can "*know*" that they have eternal life (**1 Jn. 5:11-12**). *Right here! Right now!*

c) **PETER CONDEMNED THOSE WHO WOULD "*(DENY) THE LORD THAT BOUGHT THEM.*"** (**2 Pet. 2:1-2**) Think carefully here. If you deny the biblical way of salvation, and insert other dead and living sinful human beings as mediators between you and God, you are effectively denying the sufficiency & efficacy of Christ's finished work on Calvary!

FOURTHLY, *Peter* condemned the practice of following empty tradition!

It is interesting to notice that Peter spoke out very strongly against the idea that a person could help himself get to heaven through monetary means ("*knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*" - **1 Pet. 1:18-19** NASV). You may recall that Martin Luther's rage was kindled by Friar Tetzl's blatant solicitation of money to help free people from purgatory (Tetzl's jingle was: "*As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.*"). Even today the Roman Catholic Church solicits money and engages in practices similar to those practiced by the Jews that Peter was referring to. The purchasing of masses, candles, etc., to help the deceased continues to this very day. I find it particularly significant that the Archdiocese of Port Moresby, which was responsible for publishing the article "*The Bible Alone?*" in the Post-Courier quoted several verses that contained the word "*tradition*" (albeit out of context) yet they *never* mentioned this one! I wonder why! ☺

FIFTHLY, it is worth pointing out that in the Roman Catholic article "*The Bible Alone?*" it quoted a number of other verses completely out of context, to try and support their argument.

For example, 2 Pet 1:20 was quoted *without* verse 21 which clearly shows that the author's intent was to show that the prophets did not speak prophecies *of their own will* (the point being that we must interpret any Scripture in the light of other Scriptures and with God's help, not inventing our own bizarre interpretations). The passage teaches in fact that we don't need a hierarchical organization of sinful, pontificating men to tell us what to believe. Instead we are told that the Holy Spirit will assist the believer as he compares Scripture with Scripture. That is *not* to say that we should ignore or downplay the fact that God enlightens Christians through gifted, consecrated, godly pastor/teachers (**Eph. 4:11-13**) which He gives to the body of Christ for that very purpose (**1 Jn. 2:20, 27**)! But it *is* to say that every believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, and one of the Holy Spirit's ministries is to enlighten and guide believers in their study of God's Word.

SIXTHLY and FINALLY, it is of the utmost importance to point out that *the Bible* clearly teaches that **IT ALONE** is completely and totally sufficient to meet every need of any believer for guidance, direction, wisdom, strength, etc. *Nothing else is necessary!* Note the following verses:

a) **Psalm 19:7-10** (esp. v. 7). Verse seven declares that "*the law of the Lord* (i.e. the Word of God) *is perfect, converting the soul.*" Literally translated it says that the Bible is completely sufficient to totally transform the whole person! *It is enough.* We do not need additional traditions from any source!

b) **Jude 3**. Here Jude makes it clear that the entire "*faith*" i.e. body of doctrine, was delivered *upon the completion of the canon of Scripture*. He exhorts believers to "*earnestly contend for THE faith which was once FOR ALL delivered unto the saints.*" (NASV) The obvious implication: There will be no more deliveries! Not by Joseph Smith, Ellen G. White, Mary Baker Eddy, Mohammed, Baha'u'llah, the popes, or anyone else!

c) **2 Tim. 3:16-17**. Timothy here states that "*the Bible alone*" is enough, i.e. it is sufficient to provide *EVERYTHING* a believer needs in order to become perfect i.e. *complete* or *whole*. The passage states: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God... that the man of God may be perfect (complete), thoroughly furnished unto ALL good works.*" If the Bible alone was not enough, Paul could not have said that to Timothy since theoretically at least, a person could follow everything in the Bible and still not be complete. The obvious conclusion Paul intends for us to come to is this: "*The Bible alone*" *is* enough! It *is* sufficient to make a Christian complete in every way!

CONCLUSION:

- We have seen that the Roman Catholic Church's appeal to the word "*tradition*" in various verses in the Bible gives absolutely no support to their claim that a believer should follow and obey the many traditions and beliefs Roman Catholicism has added to their system over the centuries.
- We have also seen that when the beliefs of Roman Catholicism are compared with the teachings (i.e. "*traditions*") of Scripture they are found to actually be *contrary* to biblical Christianity over and over again.
- Finally we have seen that tradition is *NOT* equal with Scripture and it is not necessary for the believer to seek for additional insights from other sources. "*The Bible alone*" **IS sufficient to meet every need the child of God has, from the day he or she is born again, until the day he or she goes to heaven!**

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