



Sola Scriptura, the Reformers, and Ellen G. White

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Definition of *Sola Scriptura*

Sola Scriptura (Latin: Scripture alone) is a teaching which holds that the Holy Scriptures only are the infallible rule of faith and duty.

The Bible alone is our norm and final authority.



Sola Scriptura and the Protestant Reformers



Sola Scriptura and the Reformers

- Reformers use of *Sola Scriptura*
- Martin Luther exclaimed, “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the foundation of our faith.” (*Review and Herald*, Nov 5, 1889)



Sola Scriptura and the Reformers

- Luther's use of *Sola Scriptura*
- “When enemies appealed to custom and tradition, or to the assertions and authority of the pope, Luther met them with the Bible, and the Bible only.” (*Great Controversy*, 132)



Sola Scriptura and the Reformers

“He [Luther] firmly declared that Christians should receive no other doctrines than those which rest on the authority of the Sacred Scriptures. . . . They contained the vital principle of the Reformation.” (Ibid., 126)

Zwingli: “Submitted himself to the Bible as the Word of God, the only sufficient, infallible rule.” (Ibid., 173)



What Separates Protestants from Rome?

- “The very principle which separates them [Protestants] from Rome is that ‘the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.’” (*Great Controversy*, 448).

The Great Need for Protestants Today

- “In our time there is a wide departure from their [Protestants] doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty.”
(*Great Controversy*, 204, 205)

Sola Scriptura and the 19th Century



Sola Scriptura at the Foundation of the Advent

- “The Adventist preachers of the Great Advent Movement used ‘the Bible and the Bible only’ as ‘their watchword.’” (*Christ in His Sanctuary*, 63)
- Ellen White wrote that it was at the time when Adventists “separated from the churches” and went forward in the light that God gave them that they “took the position that the Bible, and the Bible only, was to be our guide; and we are never to depart from this position.” (*Counsels to Writers*, 145)

Sola Scriptura and Ellen White



Ellen White Stresses *Sola Scriptura*

- *Sola Scriptura* links SDAs to the Reformation
- “The Bible standard is raised, and the same words that fell from the lips of the early reformers, are being repeated: The Bible, and the Bible only, is the foundation of our faith.” (*Historical Sketches*, 171)

Sola Scriptura

Is To Be Our Creed and Unity

- “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony.”

(1 Selected Messages, 416)

Sola Scriptura Brings Revival and Reformation

- “God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible, and the Bible alone, should be echoed from the pulpits of our land.”

(Review and Herald, Feb 27, 1908)



Why did Ellen White so frequently comment on the importance of the Bible and the Bible only?

What is so unique about the Bible?

The Bible is Divine and Human



God the Author of the Bible

“The Bible points to God as its author.” (*Great Controversy*, v)

“The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented.”

(*1 Selected Messages*, 21)

The Bible is the Word of God

“The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, none the less, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.”

(1 Selected Messages, 26).

It Is Expressed in Words of Men

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.” (1 *Selected Messages*, 21).

The Bible Is the Union of the Divine and Human

The “Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human.”
(Great Controversy, vi)

Audience



Bible Is for Practical Purposes

“The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.”

(1 Selected Messages, 20)

“The Bible was written for the common people as well as for scholars, and is written within the comprehension of all.” *(Review and Herald, Jan 27, 1885)*

The Bible Is For Common People

“It was written in a plain, simple style to meet the understanding of the common people.” (*Child Guidance*, 513)

And because “it was designed for the common people; and the interpretation given by the common people, when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Jesus.”
(*5 Testimonies*, 331)

Accuracy



Translation or Copyist Errors?

“Some look to us gravely and say, ‘Don’t you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?’ This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God.” (1 *Selected Messages*, 16)

God Guarded the Bible

“I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible; yet when copies of it were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it more plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to lean to their established views, which were governed by tradition.” *(Early Writings, 220, 221)*

Does the Bible Have Contradictions?

Those who see contradictions in the Scripture come to such conclusions because of their “imperfect comprehension of either science or revelation,” and “superficial knowledge” of the Bible.

Rightly understood, “there is perfect harmony.” (1 *Selected Messages*, 20)

The Bible an Unerring Standard

“He who has a knowledge of God and His word through personal experience has a settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures. He has proved that God’s word is truth, and he knows that truth can never contradict itself. He does not test the Bible by men’s ideas of science; he brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard.” *(Ministry of Healing, 462)*

Unity



Perfect Harmony Through All

Although it was written by various persons, each writer, she says, “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind—a different aspect of truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all.” (*Great Controversy*, vi)

The Bible Has No Contradictions

“The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction.”

(1 Selected Messages, 22)

Authority



Basis of Authority

“The Bible is God’s voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears.”

(6 *Testimonies*, 393)

Basis of Authority

“The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative infallible revelation of His will.” (*Great Controversy*, vii)

Infallibility of the Word

“Man is fallible, but God’s Word is infallible.”
(6 *Testimonies*, 402)

The Supreme Authority

“We are to receive God’s word as supreme authority” and “the unerring standard.”

(6 *Testimonies*, 402)

Authority in Doctrine and Teaching

The Bible is “the revealer of doctrines,” and “the standard by which all teaching. . . .must be tested.” (*Great Controversy*, vii)

The Rule of Faith

“The Bible, and the Bible alone is our rule of faith.” (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, 84)

Authority in History

“The Bible is the most instructive history that men possess. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. It lights up the far-distant past, where human research seeks vainly to penetrate. In God’s word we behold the power that laid the foundation of the earth and that stretched out the heavens. Here only can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.” (*Counsels on Education*, 65)

Bible Only



Superiority of the Bible

“The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith.”

(Great Controversy, 595)

All Sufficiency of the Bible

She recommends the Bible as the sufficient and ultimate authority, stating, “Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.” (*Great Controversy*, 595)

The Bible To Decide All Controversies

“It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies.”

“The Word of God is the great detector of error; to it we believe everything must be brought. The Bible must be our standard for every doctrine and practice.” *(1888 Materials, 45)*

The Bible Is Its Own Interpreter



Bible is Its Own Expositor

“The Bible must not be interpreted to suit the ideas of men, however long they may have held these ideas to be true. We are not to accept the opinion of commentators as the voice of God; they were erring mortals like ourselves. God has given reasoning powers to us as well as to them. We should make the Bible its own expositor.” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, 106)

Scripture Unlocks Scripture

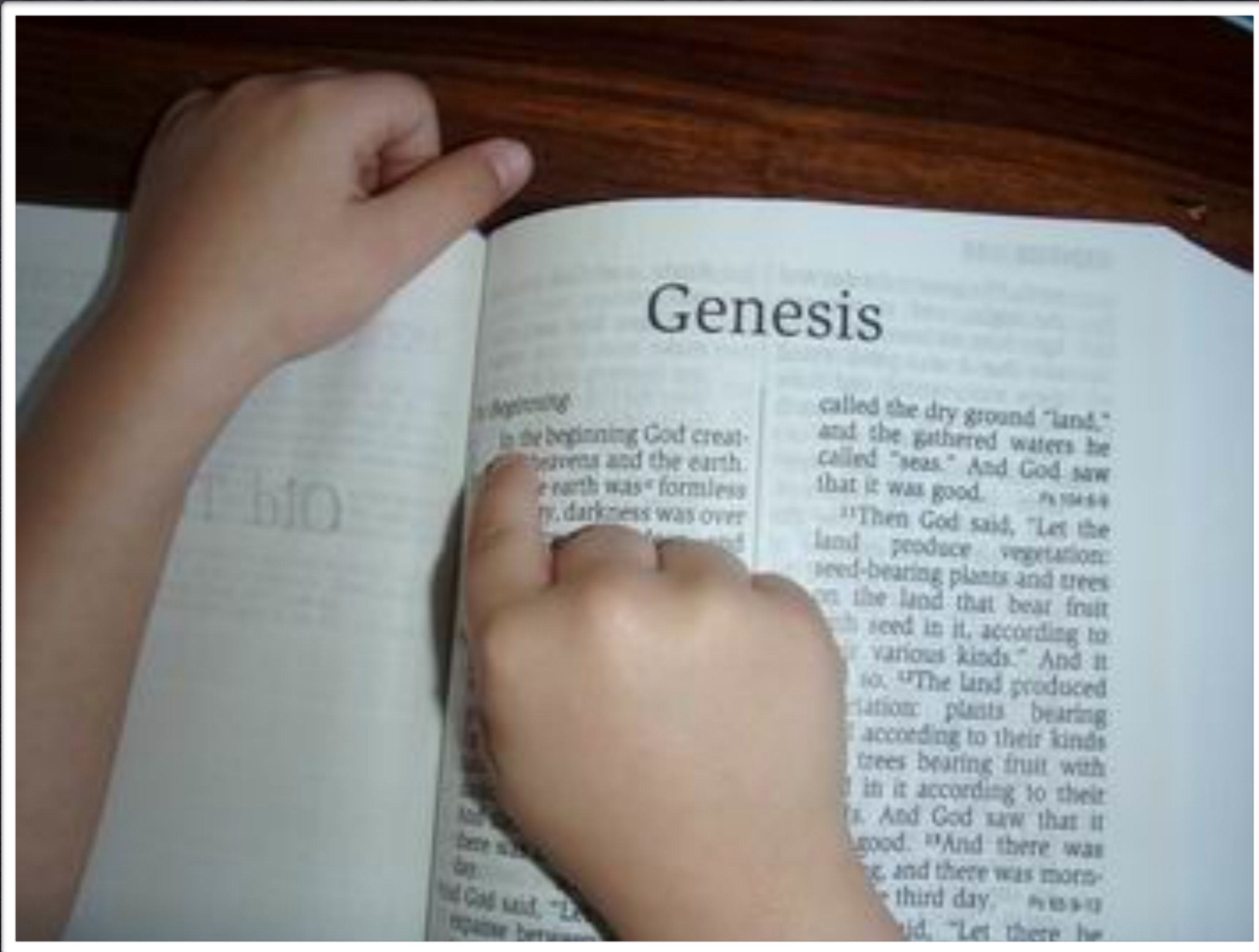
**“Study the difficult passages,” she says,
“comparing verse with verse, and you will find
that Scripture is the key which unlocks
Scripture.” “Scripture must be compared with
Scripture. There must be careful research and
prayerful reflection. And such study will be
richly repaid.” (*Signs of the Times*, Sept. 5,
1906; *Christian Education*, 59)**

How to Understand Obscure Texts

“One passage of Scripture will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the Word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident.”

(Fundamentals of Christian Education, 187)

Plain Reading



Find the Obvious Meaning

“The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed.” (*Great Controversy*, 598)

Take the Scriptures as They Read

“The plain teachings of the Word of God are not to be so spiritualized that the reality is lost sight of. Do not overstrain the meaning of sentences in the Bible. . . . Take the Scriptures as they read.”

“The application of the Scriptures must be such that the meaning shall be easily discerned.” (1 *Selected Messages*, 170; 7 *Testimonies*, 267)

Adhere to the Simplicity of Truth

“The more closely we adhere to the simplicity of truth, the more surely do we comprehend its deep meaning.” She encourages fellow believers, stating, “Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost.” (*In Heavenly Places*, 139; *1 Selected Messages*, 18)

Conclusions about *Sola Scriptura*

- 1. It was crucial to the Reformers
- 2. It separates Protestants from Rome
- 3. It is still needed today for all Christians
- 4. Adventist preachers used it in debates with opponents who rejected the Advent message
- 5. It links SDAs to Protestant Reformers
- 6. It forms the creed of SDAs
- 7. It brings out the unique divine-human nature of the Bible as God's voice, its accuracy, infallibility, inerrancy, ultimate authority and test