

often cited, this passage says only that Scripture is profitable, not that it is the sole authority. As Catholics, we believe that all Scripture is inspired by God, but we also hold that the apostolic oral tradition can convey the Word of God as well. As alluded to above, this tradition was handed down from the apostles to their successors. We see this in Scripture: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by *word of mouth* or by letter" (2 Thess 2:15).

What is our authority, then? Scripture teaches us that authority is a three-legged stool of Bible–Church–Tradition. One example is, "... the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark [or, 'foundation'] of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). It was the Church that made binding, conciliar decrees (Acts 15:6–29; 16:4).

Why do Catholics have to confess to a priest rather than directly to God?

Jesus Christ Himself established the Catholic Church and He also instituted the Church's sacramental system, in order to give humankind the greatest possible access and means to salvation, establishing stable conduits of God's grace. God gives every human being sufficient grace to be saved (if only he or she would receive it), but He wanted to provide a way to receive superabundant grace via the Sacraments. In the Church there are seven Sacraments, each established by Jesus Himself.

To understand Confession (also called Reconciliation, and including absolution and penance), it is necessary to first understand the Sacrament of Holy Orders. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the priesthood. When a man becomes a priest, he is changed internally to become "another Christ." This does not mean that the man is "preserved from all human weaknesses, the spirit of domination, error, [or] even sin" (CCC 1550). Christ Himself works through the priest when the priest is administering the Sacraments, such as celebrating the Eucharist and hearing confessions.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is Christ Who is forgiving the sins of the person through the action of the priest. The institution of this Sacrament can be seen in John 20:21–23: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'"

For the sake of clarity, nothing prevents us from asking God directly for forgiveness of our venial (less gravely serious) sins. In fact, this is a highly laudable practice,

which Catholics are encouraged to do every day in what is called the examination of conscience. But since the power of God is associated with all the Sacraments, in Confession we are guaranteed forgiveness of our sins as long as we are truly sorry before God, hold nothing back that we know offends God, and promise to try our best not to commit the same sin again. In addition to this guarantee, God also gives us the grace to help us to keep our promise to offend Him never again.

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Prayer of consecration to Jesus:

God our Father, I believe that out of Your infinite love You have created me. In a thousand ways I have shunned Your love. I repent of each and every one of my sins. Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending your Son to die for me, to save me from eternal death. I choose this day to renew my covenant with you and to place Jesus at the center of my heart. I surrender to him as Lord over my whole life and over all things.

I ask you now to flood my heart and soul with the Gift of Your Holy Spirit and to grant me the gift of new life. Give me the grace and courage to live as a missionary disciple for the rest of my days. Amen.

Common Objections



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Why are there so many scandals in the church?

The Catholic Church has always been burdened with scandal, starting with Judas' betrayal and the other disciples' abandonment of Jesus Christ during His passion and death. From (relatively few) bad popes to lay members committing evil acts, members of the Church have been engaging in scandalous behavior for her entire 2000-year history. Scripture refers to some of this scandalous behavior. Some of the Thessalonians refused to work, were living idle lives, and were overly concerned with other people's business. The scandalous behavior of individuals in the Church extends down to today's priest sex scandal. This is a tragic chapter in the history of the Church, but does this prove that the Church is not the Church founded by and upon Jesus Christ? Of course not!

The Church has been full of sinners and saints from the beginning and Jesus never promised to protect the Church from sinners. In fact, He prepared us for it with the parable of the weeds and the wheat (Mt 13:24–30). This showed us that in the Church (the Kingdom of God), the devil would sow evil seeds that would grow with the wheat until the end of time. Then the weeds will be separated from the wheat and thrown into the fire. It had to be done this way, because the sinners of today are the saints of tomorrow and only God knows who will end up where.

God gave each of us free will because He desires our true love. In order for true love to exist one has to choose it freely. This has to be a choice for rational creatures, with the option to choose either way, and to make wrong choices. God could have made us into obedient biological robots, as brute animals are, but this would not be love.

We need not despair. The Church has great sinners and great saints in it and always will, but Christ will preserve her from error, for she is His bride. She will never fail to bring us Christ, even if we fail to receive Him.

Why do Catholics worship/pray to Mary and the saints?

The short answer is we do not do so; we worship only the triune God. One source of confusion regarding this is how Catholics use the word "pray." In non-Catholic Christian circles, the word "pray" means to worship. For Catholics, however, it simply means to ask. When we "pray" to the saints in heaven we are asking for their intercession, just as Paul exhorts the saints here on earth to do: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men" (1 Tim 2:1).

Since the saints in heaven are not separated from Christ by their death (Rom 8:38), they stand in the presence of God and therefore are perfect in righteousness. Scripture tells us, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (Jas 5:16). When Catholics pray to the saints in heaven we are asking for their powerful intercessory prayers in the direct presence of God.

As for Mary, she is the greatest of all the saints, because God chose her to be the mother of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'" (Lk 1:41–43)

I have seen Catholics kneeling before and even kissing statues (graven images). How is this not worship?

When Catholics kneel before a statue, the statue is not what we have in mind, but the saint in heaven whom that statue *represents*. It is similar to carrying picture of a loved one in our wallets. Sometimes we take the picture out and just look at it adoringly. We pray to God to watch over the loved one and then kiss it before we put it back in our purse or wallet. We all understand what is happening and no one would accuse anyone of worshipping the picture.

It is the same concept with the statues. We are simply asking a saint in heaven for his or her prayers and intercession, and sometimes we express our love for this person (or angel, or God) by kissing the statue, most especially if it is a crucifix or some other depiction of Christ.

The Old Testament prohibition against graven images has to do with the worship of other gods, such as the golden calf. "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Ex 20:3–5). The image of the calf itself was worshiped as a god. In contrast, a crucifix is a *representation* of the Second Person of the Trinity and used only as a reminder of how much God loves us.

In addition, God *commanded* Moses (Ex 25:18–20) to create the images of two cherubim of gold on top of the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was so holy that if a man touched it he would die: this happened to Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6–7).

Joshua prostrated himself before the ark and prayed (Josh 7:6–7). Thus, the Ten Commandments didn't prohibit *all* images; only graven images of the false gods worshiped at the time (intended as idols to replace God). Not all images are idolatrous.

The Bible says that we are saved by faith alone, so why do you Catholics think you are saved by your works?

The Catholic Church has never taught that we are saved by our works alone. That is a misconception. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "[I]t is by grace that we are saved" (CCC 1697) and that "Faith is a gift of God. ... Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him" (CCC 153) and "Faith is necessary for salvation" (CCC 183). The Catechism also teaches that works do play a role in our salvation, "and again it is by grace that our works can bear fruit for eternal life" (CCC 1697). The Catholic Church teaches that it is by grace alone that we are saved and grace shows itself by both faith and works. Faith and works are both gifts of grace from God. We cooperate with Him (1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 6:1; Phil 2:12–13).

When the Bible speaks about works not being able to save us, it is talking about works of the Mosaic Law (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16; 3:2). James is adamant about the role that the works, *given to us by God*, play in our salvation (Jas 2:14–22). The only place in Scripture where the words "faith" and "alone" are together occurs in James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." Scripture is clear that our response to the grace God gives us, our faith in Him and the resulting works, is what completes our faith (Jas 2:22).

Why don't Catholics believe that the Bible alone is the sole authority for Christians?

In the early Church, the only written Scriptures were the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. The New Testament had not yet been written, so the early Church relied on apostolic oral tradition: the predominant way that authoritative teaching was passed on in that time, since few people could read or write. After a number of years had passed, some of this deposit was written down, in what became the first books of the New Testament.

By the time John wrote his Gospel (around the year 100), the Church had already spread throughout many parts of the Roman Empire. The final twenty-seven books of the New Testament were not put together into one canon (list of books) until around the year 400.

What does the Bible say about it being the sole authority for Christians? While 2 Timothy 3:16–17 is most

