

# The Rule of Faith

by Ian Paisley

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*Ian Paisley's sermon emphasizes the exclusive authority of the Scriptures over the traditions of the Papal Church, arguing for the necessity of private judgment in interpretation.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 4:2, Matthew 15:3, John 8:32, 2 Corinthians 2:17, Galatians 1:8, Colossians 2:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 3:16, Revelation 22:18

**Topics:** "Sola Scriptura", "Biblical Authority"

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## Description

Ian Paisley preaches about the importance of upholding the Sacred Scriptures as the Word of God and the ultimate authority in matters of faith and doctrine. He emphasizes the need to test all teachings and traditions against the standard of the Bible, rejecting anything that contradicts its clear teachings. Paisley highlights the denial of the sufficiency of Scripture and the right of private judgment by the Papal priesthood, leading to dangerous doctrines and practices. He exposes the falsification of Scriptures by the Popish priesthood to support unbiblical traditions like penance, human merit, and purgatory. Paisley condemns the violent hostility of Popery towards Bible societies and the burning of Bibles as evidence of their opposition to the Word of God.

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## Transcript

In dealing with Popery, we affirm that the Sacred Scriptures are in very deed, the Word of God; an express revelation of the Divine will on every subject which man is concerned to know, and that they are the standard by which all doctrine and all systems. Everything appertaining to religion must be tested. The great point, therefore, is, to ascertain what they state. And thus the question primarily is one of language.

It is proper to enquire into the established import of the separate words, and into the meaning of any given combination of words formed into sentences, paragraphs, or books. In determining these questions, it is permitted us to use the entire apparatus of literature, as we would in an endeavour to interpret a Greek orator, poet, or historian.

The spiritual teaching by which men are made wise unto salvation is not our present subject; we are only concerned with the entire sufficiency and the supreme authority of the Sacred Volume. To this we are willing to bring Protestant doctrine, morality, office, order, worship, and polity, and at once surrender whatever cannot be defended or supported by it in a fair, obvious, honest sense, without gloss, stain, or perversion; and by the same rule, we claim the right to test whatever appertains to Popery.

We shall accept and uphold everything in it that stands approved by the Word of God, but dispute and reject whatever has not its sanction and is directly in contradiction to it. This is our great and fundamental principle, from which we can be induced in no respect and in no degree to depart; and if Papists shall adopt the same rule, there will be a foundation laid for reasonable discussion, and possibly, at last, a means of reaching a satisfactory conclusion.

We are met, however, at the very outset, with insurmountable difficulties to anything like a rational hope of adjustment, and are compelled to enter upon a contest relative to first principles. The entire sufficiency of the Sacred Scriptures is boldly denied and vehemently contended against. It is maintained, not only that they are not sufficient, but that they are scarcely at all necessary, and that the affairs of the world's salvation can be carried on as well-if not considerably better-without them, since, to the bulk of mankind, there is very great danger arising from their general use; and that it is therefore much better that the people should not be troubled with them, but take the sum total of their instructions from the lips of the priests.

Again, the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures is wholly denied, and declared to be fraught with the most perilous consequences to the true interests of mankind. Papists allow no exercise of private judgment in this matter, but insist that the Sacred Scriptures must be received in the sense that the Church of Rome puts upon them. Here there is another fundamental principle. As Protestants, we earnestly contend for the right of private judgment, and hold that if this is to be surrendered, we may just as well at once give up the Word of God. The Scriptures would then cease to be the test and standard of the Church and of things connected with it; the Church, on the contrary, would then become the sole and only standard of the Scriptures, and everything contained therein, so that they might by all be at once abandoned.

But it is held by Papists that the Sacred Scriptures, even as interpreted by the Church, are wholly insufficient as a guide in matters spiritual, and must be supplemented by what is called tradition, which means things professed to have been held and taught in the days of the Apostles, although there is no mention of them in the Sacred Word. Of these things, the Church is held to be the true and sole depositor. This tenet constitutes the chief field of controversy between Papists and Protestants, and lies at the foundation of their conflict. It is fraught with the greatest possible danger, and lays a ground broad enough for a world of error and, imposture.

"It is the tradition of the Church," is the ready answer to every objection ; and they who allow the doctrine of tradition. have no alternative but either to receive it as such, or to dispute the allegation and endeavour to show that it could not be a tradition derived from the Apostles, forasmuch as it can be proved to have come into being at a period long after their day-an inconvenience which is to be best prevented by keeping the people in utter ignorance, which has from time immemorial been the rule of the Romish Church.

But even here, a way of retreat is ever left open, through the rule that the Church has a right to decree rites and ceremonies, and that all such enactments are clothed with superior authority over the conscience. In this way, the subjects of the Papal kingdom are wrapped in chains, and fixed in hopeless bondage. They have no other law than the will of the priesthood-a law which is unwritten, and consists wholly of the caprices of each successive generation. Under these circumstances, nothing remains for Protestants but to commence a war with the Church of Rome on the very ground of first, principles.

We deny her right to create either rites or ceremonies or to enact anything that shall be binding on the conscience; we reject and resent all her attempts so to do, as an interference with the liberties which Christ has conferred upon his people, and with his own right to govern them. We utterly reject her whole system of tradition, on ground that it was all originated in ages subsequently to that of the Apostles, that it is fraught with folly, mischief, and danger, to the souls of men, and that it is abhorrent alike to reason and to revelation allegations all capable of proof, and which have been proved a thousand times.

The entire sufficiency and exclusive authority of the Sacred Scriptures is a vital principle; the whole controversy turns upon this one point-to settle this, is, in effect, to settle everything; to set aside this, is to set aside the authority of God, and put in its place that of men, which is one of our chief accusations against the Papal priesthood, whom' we charge with usurping the place of the Lord' Jesus Christ.

God alone speaks in Scripture, man, alone speaks in tradition. In Popery, Scripture is made to flee before the face of tradition. Scripture is nothing, tradition is everything. Tradition is not satisfied with being an equal; it is a rival, and, claims to usurp the place of inspiration. Popish tradition and Sacred Scripture can no more be made to harmonize, than light and darkness, truth and falsehood. They are at utter and eternal variance., No fact is better established than that the Pope and his clergy are the enemies of the Sacred Scriptures This has been manifested in various ways; we may instance the following:

First -Violent Hostility to Bible Societies-. We instance this at the outset, because it is an event! of more recent times, occurring in our own day, and therefore capable of proof, in a manner admitting, of no denial, even by the priesthood themselves, who boast of their enmity. It has, moreover, a special value attaching to it. It is the deed, not of ancient or middle-age Popery, for which effeminate, Protestants, whose forbearance and charity are greater than their knowledge and discretion, might feel disposed to make allowance, but of the Popery of the present day.

Our proofs are at hand. Pius VII, in 1816, describes the Bible Society as ---a most crafty device, by which the very foundations of religion are undermined, "a ---pestilence," a "defilement of the faith, most imminently dangerous to souls." Pope Leo XII, in 1824, uses language still more explicit. He says, " The Bible Society strolls with effrontery through the world, contending the traditions of the Holy Fathers, and contrary to the well-known decree of the Council of Trent, labours with all its might, and by every means, to translate, or rather to pervert, the Holy Bible, in the vulgar language of every nation, from which proceeding, it is greatly to be feared, that what is ascertained to have happened to some passages, may also occur with regard to others-to wit, that by a perverse interpretation, the Gospel of Christ may be turned into a human Gospel, or what is still worse, into the Gospel of the Devil."

Such was the Papal opinion of 1821. In 1832, when Gregory XVI. occupied the Chair of Peter, so called, he echoed the testimony of his predecessors ; and Pope Pius IX the present occupant, so late as 1846 thus expressed himself: -This insidious Bible Society, renewing the craft of the ancient heretics, cease not to obtrude upon all kinds of men, even the least instructed, gratuitously, and at immense expense, copies in vast numbers of the books of the Sacred Scriptures, translated (against the holiest rules of the Church) into various vulgar tongues, and very often, with the most perverse and erroneous interpretations, to the end that (Divine tradition, the doctrine of the fathers of the Catholic Church being rejected) every one may interpret the revelation of the Almighty according to his own private judgment, and perverting their sense, fall into the most dangerous error, which society, our predecessor, Gregory XVI., of blessed memory, reproved by his apostolic letters, and we desire equally to condemn."

Thus much for a succession of four Popes, all of our own times. Surely after this there can be no, mistake as to the light in which Popery views institutions whose simple object it is to diffuse the Word of God "without note or comment." But perhaps it may be said that this hatred is founded in the fact that such societies originated with Protestants, and have been conducted by Protestants, which has excited prejudices on the part of the; Popedom. Such apology, however, will not avail for before such societies arose, and before Protestantism, as a communion, existed, Popery everywhere pursued a kindred course.

Secondly Withholding Scriptures from the People. What is the inference that every man of sense ought to draw from this fact? Is not the presumption very strong, that there was some adequate reason for adopting such a course?

It is a fact, established beyond all possibility of rational contradiction, that the Jewish Scriptures were the common property of the Jewish people, whose law provided for the public reading of them, for their domestic use and personal study. It is a fact not less certain that the Apostles wrote their Epistles, not exclusively to the pastors of the day; or rather, in fact, not to them at all, but to the Churches throughout the whole world, and that to the Churches, not to the pastors, all the Church Epistles were, without exception, transmitted.

This is a remarkable circumstance; the Apostles had no fear lest the people should not understand them, or lest they should abuse them. It is not less certain that throughout the whole earth the Scriptures were constantly read in Christian assemblies and in private families, and studied without let or hindrance by individuals. On what authority, then, it maybe asked, does the Papal priesthood withhold these Scriptures from the people? Is it possible not to entertain a suspicion that there are reasons for it reasons founded in some radical difference between the character and the constitution of the Apostolic and the Romish Churches ? But this is not all, nor is it the most serious view of the matter. The Papal priesthood, seeing they could not entirely withhold the Divine Word from mankind, have systematically proceeded to falsify it. We say, then,

Thirdly Falsifying The Scriptures. This act, alike perilous and impious, they have done for reasons, of course, sufficient to impel them to a deed so full of crime and danger. They have, in this great thing of God, done that which, had it referred to the affairs of men, would have branded them with infamy, and in some ages and in many lands cost them their liberty, their country, or their lives! Is the allegation disputed?

We shall prove it. It is probable our readers were not prepared for the facts we shall allege; since the wickedness implied is all but incredible. Nor is it in small matters, but in things most intimately affecting the lives of men, and the kingdom of God that it is displayed. For instance, the word "Repentance," the first step in, flight, from the wrath to come, is actually translated "Penance."

In Job xlii. 6, for example, "Therefore I repent myself, and do penance in dust and ashes;" again, in Ezekiel xviii. 21, "If the wicked do penance for his sins which he hath committed," and so on; and again, in 1 Kings viii. 47, "If they do penance in their heart, in the place of their captivity;" again, in Matthew iv. 17, "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand and again, in Acts xxvi. 20, where the matter is brought forward with such solemnity by the Apostle, as the first lesson he had to communicate to the, Gentiles, we have, "That they should do penance, and turn to God, doing works worthy of penance."

Thus, then, that the unscriptural, pernicious. and delusive doctrine of penance may be apparently sustained by Scripture, the Word of God is wholly perverted and a something put in the place of

repentance which has no relation whatever to it! This doing of penance is actually put in the place of the righteousness of Christ and hence the gloss of that important Scripture, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered," runs thus: "Blessed are they who, by doing penance, have obtained pardon and remission of their sins and are also covered; that is, newly clothed with the habit of grace, and vested with the stole of charity."

But the matter ends not here. The very commandments have been tampered with. For example, Butler's Catechism, used among the poor Irish, reduces the whole of the commandments to a few words; and the spelling-book, used in the Italian schools, thus presents the Fourth Commandment: "Remember to keep holy the days of Festival." An earlier version of the Scriptures was thus rendered, that it might support the Mass. The words, Acts xiii. 2, "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted" are translated, "As they offered to the Lord the sacrifice of Mass, and fasted."

Tradition is thus supported: 1 Cor. xi. 2 is rendered, "The faith which has been once given to the saints by tradition;" and to give sanction to the seven sacraments, and especially to make a sacrament of marriage (1 Cor. vii. 10), is translated, "Do not join yourselves in the sacrament of marriage with unbelievers." A similar rendering has been employed to sustain human merit. Heb. xiii. 16 is rendered, "We obtain merit towards God by such sacrifices"

Even purgatory itself has had a helping hand from the pen of the false translator: 1 Cor. iii. 15 is thus rendered, "He himself shall be saved, yet in all cases as by the fire of purgatory" We might go further, but surely this may suffice to illustrate the liberties which have been taken with the Word of God.

The fact, then, is clear beyond reasonable dispute. Will it End, in any man of sense, an apology? If so, we shall supply the apologist with another consideration, by giving him to understand that,

Fourthly. -The Popish Priesthood have destroyed the Word of God-. Does the reader shudder at such an allegation? He well may; but it is not the less true. In Great Britain, in Ireland, on the Continent of Europe, and wherever Popery has had a foundation, history most abundantly testifies to the truth of this dreadful fact. The Popish priesthood know and feel that their system is not only not 'based upon the Word of God, but utterly opposed to it.

They have most abundantly shown that nothing is wanted but the power to remove that Word entirely from the face of the earth. The spirit of Popery and the spirit of the Bible are as opposite as light and darkness; and thus, it is with the rule of faith. The Spirit of God speaks in the Bible, and the spirit of Popery in tradition, and their distinctive utterances it is impossible to harmonize; the Bible-burners of Popery and the living temples of the Holy Ghost are as diverse the one! from the other as truth and falsehood, angels and devils!

Even in Canada, Bible-burning is a special priestly pastime! Unhappy Ireland has everywhere, and for ages been signalised by it. So late as the beginning of 1848 twenty-two, Bibles were burned in the street of a chief town, hundreds of spectators dancing and yelling around the fire, while the priest sat at the window of a house, illumined for the occasion, drinking his wine, and evidently enjoying the horrible scene! Within a few days of the time at which we write, the priests of Italy burned large quantities of the Word of God.

We submit to all men of sense that this single point the light in which Popery views, and the treatment which it offers to the Word of God - ought to be decisive of the whole question. They are shut up to one of

two conclusions-either Popery is not of God, or the Bible is not of God; and with this fact before them, they are to make their choice. If, however, Popery be not of God, it must be of the Wicked One. This inference there is no resisting; and its importance is all the greater, because it serves to explain a system otherwise inexplicable-a system, every part of which militates against the glory of God, and the best interests, both for time and eternity, of his creatures.

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