

Christian Unity: Protestant disunity over serious issues of eternal salvation

By Graham Osborne

In John 17 Jesus prays for the "perfect" unity of his followers, the same unity that He has with the Father, so the world will know that God sent Him - this is the heart of evangelization.

Nothing has fractured Christianity more than Sola Scriptura. But some try to claim that these differences are minor, and only involve insignificant issues. But even a cursory investigation indicates that nothing could be further from the truth. These differences are not minor, but are issues of eternal salvation, as we will see below.

But my point in writing this is not to stir up controversy, but to make sure that people full understand the magnitude of the situation: that they are not deceiving themselves into believing that the massive disunity caused by Sola Scriptura is inconsequential. It is not. And it absolutely involves numerous differences over matters of eternal significance.

Jesus: teach them to "observe ALL that I have commanded":

-Matt 28:18-20 *Jesus... said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe ALL that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."*

1. Jesus said to teach all nations **ALL** that he has commanded! So He **must have made a way for this to happen!** How do we know **ALL** that Jesus has commanded? Through His Church, guided by the Holy Spirit He promised to send it [see a Scriptural confirmation of this at the end of this article].
2. Sola Scriptura definitely has not been able to do this: 30,000 different denominations or more, all teaching significantly different, contradictory doctrines. And even if it is less than 100 denominations, as some contend, that is still 99 too many!
3. No false doctrine has led to more Christian division and disunity than Sola Scriptura
4. You will know a tree by its fruit. The fruit of this tree has been radical, tragic division, absolutely contrary to Jesus' prayer for "perfect" Christian unity in John 17

These divisions are NOT over minor issues, but major issues of eternal salvation:

For example:

1. Does baptism [with faith of course] save you, or not?
 1. **Mark 16:16** *He who believes and is baptized will be saved*
 2. **1 Peter 3:20-21** *the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now*
 3. **Titus 3:5-7** *He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit [BAPTISM!], which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.*
 4. **Acts 19:2-3** *he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"... they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."*
 5. **John 3:3-5** *"Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."*
 6. **Ezekiel 36:25-27** *I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses... A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you... I will put my spirit within you*
 7. **Gal 3:27** *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
2. Do you baptize babies or not?
 1. **Acts 2:38-39** *Peter (said) to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children*
3. Can you lose your salvation or not?

1. **1 Cor 15:1-2** Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved, **if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**
 2. **Luke 8:13** And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, **they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.**
 3. **Heb 12:14** Strive for... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.
 4. **2 Peter 2:20-21** For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For **it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness** than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them
 5. **Heb 6:4-6** For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.
 6. **Matt 25** Sheep & Goats: all believe, but **only** sheep who did the good works go to heaven, the "evildoers" DO NOT!: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry... Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil... they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
 7. **Matt 7:21** Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father
 8. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.
 9. **Gal 5:18-21** Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that **those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.**
 10. **1 Cor 4:3-5** I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
4. Unless you eat my body and drink my blood, you cannot enter have eternal life [John 6]
1. Many Protestants believe this [many Anglicans, many Lutherans, and some others]
 2. Martin Luther quote on John 6 and the Eucharist, summarizing the constant teaching of the Christian Church on this matter:
 1. "Who but the devil, hath granted such a license of wresting the words of the holy Scripture? Who ever read in the Scriptures, that "my body" is the same as "this is a sign of my body"? Or, that "is" is the same as "it signifies"? What language in the world ever spoke so? It is only then the devil, that imposeth upon us by these fanatical men.... Not one of the Fathers, though so numerous... ever said, "It is only bread and wine"; or, "the body and blood of Christ is not there present". Surely it is not credible... that they should never (if they thought so)... let slip these words: "It is bread only" or "the body of Christ is not there", especially it being of great importance, that men should not be deceived. Certainly in so many Fathers, and in so many writings, the negative might at least be found in one of them had they thought the body and blood of Christ were not really present: but they are all of them unanimous."
 3. Whether you believe Luther, the founder of the Reformation got it wrong or not [troubling that the founder got it wrong, don't you think?], this quote summarizes the belief of the early Christian Church that came before Luther, the same Church you say you are a part of, but that fell away at the council of Trent. Luther is summarizing the constant, unanimous belief of EVERY Christian and EVERY early Church Father before the Council of Trent, the same Church you claim to descend from. That Church unquestionably believed in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

4. a symbolic interpretation of John 6 goes against the literal sense of the text because the Jews understand Jesus is speaking literally about eating His Body and Blood, Jesus knows this, they leave, and He lets them go - because he was speaking literally
5. Is divorce and remarriage/fornication acceptable or not?
 1. MANY denominations teach that it is! Many teach that it is okay to divorce, remarry, and contracept!
 2. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. [also Galatians 5:18-21]
6. Is there error in Scripture or not?
 1. Many denominations believe there is. That's pretty serious!
 2. The Catholic Church teaches that the Bible is inerrant: without error [though not all Catholics believe that! But that is the teaching of the Church]
7. Do you need to do grace-inspired good works/keep God's commandments to love God and be saved, or not?
 1. **Matt 19:16-17** *"Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "... If you would enter life, keep the commandments."*
 2. **1 John 5:3** *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*
 3. **John 3:36** *He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life*
 4. **Rom 2:6-10** *For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;*
 5. **James 2:14, 24-26** *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.*
 6. *Do not confuse grace-inspired good works with the Jewish "works of the law" St Paul mentions in Romans or Galatians. These are the Jewish Mosaic ceremonial laws, over 600 of them including circumcision, which cannot save us, ESPECIALLY when not connected to faith in Jesus, which is the basic message of much of Romans and Galatians*
8. Is contraception permissible or not?
 1. All Protestant reformers were EXTREMELY opposed to contraception [including Calvin], and equated it to murder, calling it a "monstrous crime"
 2. MANY contraceptives cause early term abortions [Like the Pill, IUD's and many others]
 3. Until 1930, virtually all Protestant denominations taught that contraception in any form was a grave moral evil. Now there are few that reject it and most actively encourage it, so many are actually encouraging an early form of abortion
 4. Many Protestant denominations teach that abortion is permissible, even a woman's right
 1. mind you, some catholics believe this too, but that is not what the Church teaches
9. Is an active LGBT lifestyle permissible or not?
 1. MANY Protestant denominations teach that it is, and we know sodomy is clearly condemned by God in Scripture[e.g. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:18-21**

Baptism:

The final and irrefutable answer comes from Scripture itself. What does the Bible say about baptism? Is it just a symbolic washing, as some Christians believe, or is it necessary for salvation, i.e. does it "save" us, as the Catholic Church teaches.

Unquestionably, the Bible teaches that baptism "saves you". This is literally what St Peter says in 1 Peter 3:20-21: *[In the ark]... eight persons were saved through water. **Baptism**, which corresponds to this, **now saves you***. It doesn't get much clearer than that! Then, in Acts 2:38, St. Peter again says: *"Repent, and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; and you shall receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**."* And in Galatians 3:27, St Paul confirms that *"all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

But ultimately, it is Jesus Himself who definitively answers the question. In Mark 16:16, He says, *"whoever **believes and is baptized will be saved**."* Need we say more?

Loss of Salvation:

St. John teaches that there is something called “*mortal*” or deadly sin, sin that separates us from God and kills the life of grace in the soul necessary to enter Heaven (Catholics call this Sanctifying Grace). He writes, “*If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that.*” **1 John 5:16.**

Additionally, in **1 Cor 4:3-5**, St. Paul says that he doesn’t even judge himself saved –only God knows the heart, and so, this judgment is reserved for Him alone: “*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. **I do not even judge myself.** I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore **do not pronounce judgment before the time,** before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart”. And then again, he says, “*Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, **if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain**” (1 Cor 15:1-2).**

And in **1 Cor 9:27**, he adds, “*but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*”(1 Cor 9:27). Similarly, in **Phillipians 2:1-2**, he repeats, “*that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. **Not that I have already obtained this** or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own”.*

In **2 Peter 2:20-21**, St Peter writes, “*For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For **it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness** than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.”*

Heb 6:4-6 it says, “*For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.”*

Even Jesus Himself unquestionably teaches that a believer can lose his salvation. For instance, in the parable of the sower and the seeds in **Luke 8:13**, He says, “*And the ones (seeds) on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.”*

In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (**Matthew 25:31-46**), Jesus again makes it perfectly clear that believers can lose their salvation if they do not do the works of charity that He himself calls them to. Both the sheep and the goats are believers -both call Him, “Lord”. But only the sheep go to Heaven. And to the goats, He reserves some of His strongest words in all of Scripture: “*Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. “*

Additionally, in **Matt 7:21**, Jesus confirms that “*Not everyone who says ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father.”*

What is the answer to the division created by individual Scriptural interpretation in Sola Scriptura?:

Jesus founded a Church, and sent the Holy Spirit to guide it and protect it from error:

- Jesus didn’t first write a book, but first founded a Church on rock [Matthew 16 and Jesus, the wisest builder [Matthew 7], and “ the gates of Hell will not prevail against it: it will NEVER fall
- founded it foremost on Peter, the “rock”, and then all the Apostles [Ephesians 2]
- He promised the Holy Spirit to protect this Church from error [Charism of infallibility], a protection given to officially [“dogmatically”] defined teachings on faith and morals [not science, history, etc] given for the universal Church to believe
- *John 14-16: “the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you... be with you always, the Spirit of truth... When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all the truth... and he will declare to you the things that are to come”*
- He gave this church the “keys to the kingdom of Heaven”
- and see the context of ythis verse Jesus is referencing from Isaiah 22, and the perpetual office of Steward in the Davidic kingdom, still in place centuries after King David’s death: it was an office to be filled, and Jesus is now filling it in Matthew 16 with Peter, his first “prime minister [or Pope, which is Greek for papa]
- Historically, the Church Jesus founded is the Catholic Church. Prior to the Reformation [and the Eastern Orthodox schism], virtually every single Christian was Catholic

- There were Bishops, priests and deacons, and every one of them could trace their ordination back in an unbroken line to one of the Apostles. If your denomination is not Apostolic, why not?
- 110AD, **St Ignatius of Antioch** [martyred for the faith and taught by St John himself!!!] would confirm that: *“In the same way all should...respect the bishop as representing the Father and the priests as the council of God and the college of the Apostles. Apart from these there is nothing that can be called a Church.”*
- **St. Irenaeus** [» 190 AD] would write: *“...we shall confound all those... by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome... that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its superior origin, **all the Churches must agree**, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and **it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition.**”*

- In 2000 years, the Church has NEVER contradicted itself in its official [dogmatically defined] teachings on faith and morals. NEVER!!! No other Christian Church can make that claim.