



## Chapter One

# Scripture and Tradition: The Word of God

### What the CHURCH says...

**1** *Ask: Could someone please read "What the Church says..."?"*

#### **1** What the CHURCH says...

The Catholic Church believes that the **Word of God** is handed on in two ways: **Sacred Scripture** and **Sacred Tradition**.

**Sacred Scripture** is the **Word of God** that was written down "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to *writing*" (CCC 76, emphasis added).

**Sacred Tradition** is the **Word of God** handed down "by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received" (CCC 76).

**Sacred Tradition** is sometimes referred to as oral Tradition.

This idea of Tradition can be confusing. Tradition (big T) is different than the traditions of the Church (small t). Traditions (small t) include praying the rosary or using Advent candles. These are important to our Church, but can change over time. Sacred Tradition (big T) is the **Word of God** passed on from Jesus to the apostles and to us today—this does not change over time.

Another important factor that plays a role in God's word is the **Magisterium**. The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Church given to the apostles and their successors by Jesus Christ. These successors would be the bishops of the Catholic Church, including the Pope, the bishop of Rome. The task of the **1**

#### Note to Leader:

This concept of Tradition might take some time to digest. As the chapter goes on, it should become clearer. If not, an In-depth Insight section and resources can be found at the end of the chapter.

Magisterium is to give an authentic interpretation of the **Word of God**. And yet, the Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant (see CCC 86). Through the Holy Spirit, it hands on the Word of God. **2**

## Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** *Ask: Could someone please read "Why the Church believes this..."?*

## Not Just in the Gospels

**3** *Say: Let's look at the first reason for Sacred Tradition. The Gospel writers themselves tell us that not everything about Jesus was written down.*

**4** *Ask: Could someone please read John 21:25?*

*Say: Think about it. Jesus did so many things that weren't recorded in the Bible. This didn't mean that they weren't important. In fact, let's look at a time when St. Paul uses a phrase by Jesus not recorded in the Gospels.*

**5** *Ask: Could someone please read Acts 20:35?*

*Say: The phrase "It is more blessed to give than to receive" is not found anywhere in the Gospels and yet St. Paul assumes that his listeners knew this phrase.*

**6** *Ask: How could they have known this phrase already if it were not in the Gospels?*

Answer: They heard it through Tradition. At this time, John's Gospel hadn't even been written yet. Early Christian communities relied heavily on Tradition. It is all that they had at first.

### Why the CHURCH believes this...

**2** There are several reasons why the Church believes in both Scripture and Tradition. Since this is a Scriptural Apologetics Bible Study, we are going to look at how Scripture itself attests to the idea of Tradition. Below are two reasons that we will examine further in this chapter.

**1.** The New Testament writers speak of other things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the Gospels.

**2.** St. Paul goes into further detail about written and oral Tradition and how it is passed down to others.

### Not Just in the Gospels

**1.** The New Testament writers speak of other things that Jesus did and said that were not recorded in the Gospels.

**3** **4** **5** **6**  
**Read John 21:25**

**Read Acts 20:35**

**2** How could they have known this phrase already if it were not in the Gospels?

**2**

## Passing It On

### Passing It On

**7** *Say: St. Paul also talks about Tradition. Let's turn to St. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians.*

**7**

**2.** St. Paul goes into further detail about written and oral Tradition and how it is passed down to others.

**2**

**8** *Ask: Could someone please read 2 Thessalonians 2:15?*

**8**

**Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15**

**9**

How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?

**9** *Ask: How does this verse support the Catholic belief about Tradition?*

**10**

**Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2**

**3**

Answer: It shows that the apostles did not just put everything down in writing, but that they also expected early Christians to follow their oral instructions as well.

**10** *Ask: St. Paul not only notes that Tradition or teachings exist, but also that they should be passed on to others. Could I have someone please read 2 Timothy 2:1-2?*

*Say: This is the whole idea behind Sacred Tradition. The apostles take what they learned from Jesus Christ and teach it to others who, in turn, pass it on to others. This Word of God passed on is what Catholics call Tradition.*

**Note to Leader:** In almost every chapter, we included a section called "In-depth Insight." These sections detail a particular point in a more concentrated or even academic way. Depending on your group or time available you may want to skip or come back to this section later.

**11** Ask: Could someone please read the "In-depth Insight"?

**11** In-depth Insight

Here is another way to look at Scripture and Tradition. In regards to Scripture, all Christians agree on what the Bible says, but we do not agree on what the Bible means. Tradition helps us see how the apostles understood Jesus and how they lived and what they taught as a result. It provides the historical context for understanding what the Word of God means.

A practical example might help illustrate. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus clearly tells his apostles to "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." But, people in the early Church and even in the Church today ask the question, should we baptize infants? There is not direct teaching in Scripture for or against infant Baptism. Tradition tells us the apostles baptized infants. Although not in Scripture, the apostles were either told or shown to do this by Jesus or told this through the Holy Spirit. In turn, the Catholic Church uses this form of the Word of God as its basis for baptizing infants today.

The Tradition of the Catholic Church is a beautiful resource to have. Much of this Tradition is contained in the works and writings of the Early Church Fathers, men who lived in the first centuries after Jesus. Because Tradition helps us understand what Scripture means, many Protestants have turned to Catholicism through the writings of these men. For an introduction to Early Church Fathers, see *The Early Church Fathers* by Mike Aquilina.

3

**Conclusion**

**12** Ask: Could someone please read the "Conclusion"?

**12** Conclusion

The idea of Scripture and Tradition brings up two important apologetic points pertaining to the Protestant belief in *Sola Scriptura* (basing all their beliefs off on the written Word of God alone).

First, when we study Tradition, we realize that Tradition had to come before Scripture. The Word of God was spoken by the apostles and their successors even before the Bible was completed. When we examine the early Church it is also apparent that no set canon or what we know as the books included in the Bible was established officially until the end of the fourth century. It would be hard for the early Christians to rely solely on Scripture.

Second, the Protestant acceptance of *sola scriptura* is really a rejection of the authority of the Catholic Church and its ability to interpret Scripture and to pass on Tradition. They believe that one can come to a correct understanding of Scripture through the Holy Spirit. This naturally leads to the question: If this is the case for all people seeking truth who read the Scriptures, why are there 30,000 denominations with competing doctrines about grace, morality, etc.? With charity, this is an important question for us to pose to Protestants to encourage them to grapple with the consequences that occur without authority.

4

Whereas Scripture itself claims in 1 Timothy 3:15, "...if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which acts as the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth." St. Paul points to the Church as "pillar and bulwark [or safeguard] of the truth," that is a guide for Christians. We will look more into the authority of the Church next chapter.

When we examine the Scripture, Church history, and logic, the idea of Tradition and the Church's authority is not only reasonable, but essential to our Christian faith.

4

More Scripture verses: 1 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:13-14; 2 Peter 1:20-21  
CCC: 78, 80-84, 95, 113, 120

*Made for More:* p. 103-108

Extra Resources:

*By What Authority: An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition* by Mark Shea  
*Why Is That in Tradition?* by Patrick Madrid

Reading for next time: Matthew 16:13-20; Isaiah 22:15-24; Acts 1:15-26

## Practical Objections

**Note to Leader:** For more information on the Practical Objections—read the introduction in the Student Guide (found on the next page). Feel free to read this as a group or explain it to your group. For information on how you can help facilitate practical objections, see below.

When going through the objections as a group, rather than publically correcting the one giving the answer, refer them to the answer key in their Student Guide and ask them what they did well and what they could improve. If appropriate, you can add a word or two of encouragement and improvement as well. As the leader, you have all the answers directly after the objection.

Some objections will be answered by simply using the information learned previously. Other times new information will be needed to answer an objection or to address the objection itself. This gives the respondent a chance to think on their feet. If they don't know the answer or aren't able to come up with a reasonable answer, it is good to learn to respond, "I'm not sure, let me ask someone/do some studying and I will get back to you.")

**13** Ask: For the "Practical Objections" section, we are going to learn how to answer some common objections while also learning one of the seven principles. Could I have someone read the apologetics principle and definition for this chapter?

Ask: What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

Ask: Could someone please read Objection 1?

Ask: Who would like to try to respond?

**14** **Response:** That's a great question. Talking about the faith can be difficult at

**Practical Objections**

The purpose of the "Practical Objections" section is to introduce a few of the most common objections to that apologetics topic.

While you are answering these objections, your group will be working on one of the seven apologetics principles of dialogue. For chapter one, the principle is: Show that you are open to dialogue. As a group, brainstorm ways to enact this principle in an apologetics conversation.

When you are going through the actual objections, you can use these objections in a few ways. Someone can volunteer to answer the objection in a straight forward manner. Or, you can have a mock dialogue in front of the whole study. Or, you can split up into partners and all practice a mock dialogue. Also, if you run out of time, begin the next study by using the objections of the previous study. This provides a good review of the topic from last time.

**13** **Apologetics Principle #1: Show you are open to dialogue:** By being cool, calm, and collected in the face of any objection, the other person will be more open to dialogue.

What are some ways that we can act out this principle during an apologetics dialogue?

**5**

**14** **Objection 1**  
The Catholic Church's reliance on and belief in tradition is opposed to Jesus' words in **Matthew 15:6**: "For the sake of your traditions, you have made void the word of God."

**Answers to every objection can be found in the Appendix of this Bible study.**

**6**

times, but I believe it is the most important thing to discuss. So, I really enjoy it when people ask me questions about the faith.

It is important to realize what Jesus means when He says tradition. He is speaking of manmade traditions that have come about over the course of history. When Catholics speak of Tradition we are talking about the Word of God handed on from Jesus to the apostles and to their successors and us today. This Tradition is not manmade; it is the Word of God passed on orally. This Tradition never goes against Scripture or “makes void the word of God.”

Scripture attests to this type of Tradition: In **2 Thessalonians 2:15**, St. Paul says, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.” Clearly, St. Paul is not against handing on instructions and practices “by word of mouth or by letter,” and certainly not against Christians holding to them.

*Ask: Can someone please read Objection 2?*

15

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

15

#### **Objection 2**

Why would we need Tradition? Scripture alone is sufficient as **2 Timothy 3:16** says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

6

**Responding to the objection:** Catholics do believe that Scripture is profitable, but this verse does not say that Scripture alone is sufficient for us. Also, St. Paul says “for every good work.” This would not include all matters of *faith*.

In this same letter, St. Paul exhorts Timothy to pass on the teachings that Timothy had heard from St. Paul, not just the ones he wrote down (2 Timothy 2:2).

#### **Response from additional information:**

Was St. Paul referring to the New Testament Scriptures? In v. 15 he says: “From childhood, you have been acquainted with the sacred writings...” Because the New Testament had not been written in their childhood, this can only refer to the Old Testament. If Protestants want to claim that St. Paul is speaking about using these Scriptures alone, then they would only use the Old Testament.

**16** Ask: Can someone please read Objection 3?

*Ask: Who would like to try to respond?*

**Response:**

When John makes this statement, he is only

speaking about the book of Revelation. He could not have known that this statement would be at the end of the Bible. Also, in **Deuteronomy 4:2**, the same type of statement is made: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it." If this statement is interpreted like Revelation was then we should not read past Deuteronomy.

**16**

**Objection 3: Think on your feet**

Catholics have added practices and beliefs to the Christian faith that are not found in Scripture. At the end of the Bible, John warns against adding anything to Scripture in **Revelation 22:18**: "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book..."

**7**