

Drowning in the Tiber (Part 8)
Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:
Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic
-Sola Scriptura 2-

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Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Clarkson Community Church
by
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Open your Bibles to Psalm 119 and stand. We're going to begin reading in verse 17:

Deal bountifully with Thy servant that I may live and keep Thy word. Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law. I am a stranger in the earth. Do not hide Thy commandments from me. My soul is crushed with longing after Thine ordinances at all times. Thou dost rebuke the arrogant, the cursed, who wander from Thy commandments. Take away reproach and contempt from me for I observe Thy testimonies. Even though princes sit and talk against me, Thy servant meditates on Thy statutes. Thy testimonies also are my delight. They are my counselors. My soul cleaves to the dust. Revive me according to Thy word. I have told of my ways and Thou hast answered me. Teach me Thy statutes. Make me understand the way of Thy precepts so that I will meditate on Thy wonders. My soul weeps because of grief. Strengthen me according to Thy word. Remove the false way from me and graciously grant me Thy law. I have chosen the faithful way. I have placed Thine ordinances before me. I cleave to Thy testimonies. O Lord, do not put me to shame. I shall run the way of Thy commandments for Thou wilt enlarge my heart.¹

[Opening Prayer]

Well, we have a lot to look at this morning and we're going to need every bit of the full hour in doing so. We're going back to finish up what we started last week as it relates to the doctrine of sola scriptura in light of Francis Beckwith's book, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic*. My anticipation is that last week was really a set-up for today, and by that I mean, last week we covered a lot of the basics. I think the really fun stuff comes this morning, at least, for me. If I can borrow from a baseball analogy, last week was a single and I'm praying that this morning will be a home run, or at least a double. At any rate, I trust we'll drive the runner home.

I want to begin again just with a simple definition of sola scriptura, a Latin phrase meaning "Scripture alone." And this taken, in part, out of the 1689 London Baptist Confession. And I say by

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1971).

“in part” because the confession expands upon this but the first statement, I think, is suitable, and it is this:

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

In other words, it is the plumb line. It’s the standard by which we measure and gauge truth, particularly truth as it relates to the Gospel. Sola scriptura has come down to be known as what we call the formal principle of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation. The formal principle refers to that which is written down as the basis for what we believe; that which is codified. The formal principle leads to the material principle which is the central truth of what one believes and in our case that would be sola fide and sola gratia, salvation by faith alone, and we would add through Christ alone. And that’s why I said last time that there’s a direct connection between one’s view of the Bible as truth, and one’s view as to the Gospel. Those two cannot be separated. Those who believe in the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures and it’s subsequent absolute authority and sufficiency are far less prone to pervert the Gospel of grace than those who do not. The doctrine of sola scriptura is a safeguard against myriads of false doctrines and perversions of the Gospel of grace. When the Bible is misused, when it’s ignored or supplemented with the traditions of men, it is at the peril of those who refuse to place themselves under the Scripture’s absolute and final authority. Now we compare this to the Roman Catholic position on the Bible and authority and we find that their authority is two-fold. It consists of sacred tradition and a sacred Scripture. The Council of Trent, the Fourth Session, claims that no one has the right to the private interpretation of Scripture, something, by the way, that apologists and even Francis Beckwith, himself, engages in all the time, by that, I mean Roman Catholic apologists. But no one has the right to a private interpretation of Scripture. Vatican I, Session Three, 24th of April, 1870, chapter two on revelation:

in matters of faith and morals . . . that meaning of holy scripture must be held to be the true one, which Holy Mother Church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of holy scripture.

In other words, *it’s what we say it is*. Same thing with Vatican II, we see [those] two-source(s): sacred tradition and sacred Scripture—and sacred tradition in the end means *whatever the church says it is*.

Quoting Vatican II:

Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.²

²Cited in David T. King, *Holy Scripture: The Ground and Pillar of Our Faith* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, Inc., 2001), 1:50.

And, as we said last time, when you boil it all down what it usually comes to at its heart for the Roman Catholic Church is the doctrine of *sola ecclesia roma*, solely according to the church of Rome. Whatever Rome says, even if it's contrary to history, Scripture, or plain logic, is the truth because she says it is, end of argument. But for us, *sola scriptura* means that the canonical Scriptures are sufficient to serve as the *regula fide*, or the infallible rule of faith for the believer and the church. The church is not the plumb line; the Scriptures are the plumb line as it relates to truth.

So we have those two issues: authority and sufficiency. The Scriptures are the final authority; the Scriptures are sufficient. They're sufficient to lead us to salvation in Christ. They're sufficient to guide us in sanctification, or growth in holiness—and by the way, both of those elements, leading us to salvation and growth in godliness, we find in 2 Peter where Peter writes in chapter one that:

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him Who called us by His own glory and excellence.³

We have—Peter writes from prior to the end of the 1st century—we have all things pertaining to life and godliness.

For by these, He has granted us His promises—His precious and magnificent promises, in order that, by them, you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lusts.⁴

Where do we find the promises of God? We find them in the Word of God. And Peter even goes on to refer toward the end of the chapter to his wonderful experience that he had with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration that which is recorded in Matthew, chapter 17, and as wonderful as that was, and as important as it was, he says:

We didn't follow cleverly devised tales when we told you about these things, we were eye witnesses, we heard the utterance that was made by the majestic glory, This is My beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased. We heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.⁵

³2 Peter 1:3.

⁴2 Peter 1:4.

⁵2 Peter 1:16-18.

And even in light of that, he says:

We have the prophetic word made more sure to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place.⁶

In his book, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic*, Francis Beckwith attempts to give a definition of what he thought *as a Protestant* sola scriptura was—and we noted last week—he never really seemed to understand what the doctrine was all about in the first place. And when reflecting on what role that doctrine of sola scriptura had to play in his defecting back to the Roman Catholic Church, he writes:

To be blunt, it didn't, primarily because over the years I could not find an understanding or definition of sola scriptura convincing enough that it did not have to be so qualified that it seemed to be more a slogan than a standard.⁷

Interestingly, in his book, in a section which he subtitles, “Slouching Towards Rome,” he conveys a story about his attending a February 2006 conference on *John Paul II and Philosophy* held at Boston College. It was there that he delivered a paper he had written a year earlier (2005) entitled *Vatican Bible School: What John Paul II Can Teach Evangelicals*. So, again, we get [another] glimpse into the fact that Dr. Beckwith was all along very sympathetic to Roman Catholicism—and even to the point of the catchy title—*Vatican Bible School: What John Paul II Can Teach Evangelicals*—and to the point of going to Roman Catholic Boston College to share that! And after delivering his paper in 2006, he was asked a question by a Boston College philosophy professor whom, he says, was a former Evangelical converted to Catholicism while at Notre Dame. This is the question . . . that she asked him after he delivered his paper:

Your paper seems to imply the necessity of creeds in the first centuries of the Church. But that assumes the necessity of a Magisterium . . .

Capital M, a teaching authority.

. . . that has the authority to issue such creeds and declare them normative for all Christians. So, why aren't you a Catholic?⁸

And he says he answered her question by saying that the Reformers gave Spirit-led correctives that reach back into the past to correct what Rome had lost. And he writes:

⁶2 Peter 1:19.

⁷*Return to Rome*, 79.

⁸*Ibid.*, 76.

By doing this, I tried to account for a church's continuity as being connected to the Reformers and their descendants as well as their orthodox predecessors in the Catholic Church. . . .

*Whatever that means.*⁹

. . . In this way, I could defend the Catholic creeds as Spirit-directed without conceding the present authority of Rome on these matters.¹⁰

Now here you have a philosophy professor at Boston College, and frankly, any Roman Catholic associated with Boston College should be one of the last people on earth to appeal to Rome's monolithic standard of authority. Boston College is one proof of many that the Roman Catholic Church is a potpourri of opinions on everything Catholic. But beyond that, her question forms what we call in logic a *non sequitur*. It means "it does not follow." *It does not follow* that because the early church came together in the first few centuries to define the central doctrines of the faith from the Bible does not mean the church was in authority over the Bible, and *it does not follow* that those who affirm those early creeds are the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church that exists today. And that's the implication of her statement, a statement, apparently, that Beckwith agrees with. And he goes on to say that since becoming Catholic himself, he sees that:

. . . the task of proper restoration fell to thoughtful Catholic reformers that led to the Council of Trent and its successors.¹¹

In other words, it was the sixteenth Council of Trent that brought "a reformation" to the church. Of course, that begs the question, "How can an infallible church with an infallible papacy ever be subject to reformation?" That would be akin to saying that it's time we reform our Bible and make some changes in it. If anything, friends, the sixteenth century Roman Catholic Council of Trent shut the door on any hope of reformation, a door that Vatican I later locked by demanding that all interpretational authority on all things spiritual belongs to Holy Mother Church.

Go back in time to the early monastic life of Martin Luther. He's studying at Erfurth, the university in Germany. Along comes John Staupitz, a peculiar monk with unusual discernment and Staupitz sees Luther and he marvels at Luther's emaciated body, his sunken eyes, a man who appeared to be in spiritual anguish. And that was something that Staupitz himself understood and wrestled with. So he becomes a mentor to Luther. And in so doing, he points Luther, not to the church as a source of spiritual rest, but to the Scriptures. And he tells Luther, "Get your theology, Martin, from the Bible

⁹Beckwith was caught in the conundrum of trying to defend the Reformation against what he considered to be the same Roman Catholic Church that established the early creeds. However, he is guilty of anachronism on this essential point.

¹⁰*Return to Rome*, 76-77.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 77.

and not from the schools." He says, "Let the study of the Scriptures be your favorite occupation,"¹² and he gave Luther that which would have been a tremendous treasure at the time, a Bible. And so the great reformer immersed himself into it and it wasn't long after that he had his Romans 1:17 experience and a voice thundered in his heart, "The just shall live by faith," and he found the truth of the Gospel of grace and the peace that had so long eluded him. That advice that Staupitz gave was good, but it could not have been lawfully given after the Council of Trent, that which Beckwith refers to as the great reforming element in the church.

The same year that Beckwith announced that he was returning back to the Roman Catholic Church of his youth, he was interviewed by Evangelical apologist Greg Koukl on the latter's radio broadcast, "Stand to Reason." During the two hour interview, Beckwith refers to the Council of Trent, and he says:

If you read the Council of Trent—which by the way really shocked me. I expected to read this sort of horrible document requiring people to stick pins in their eyes, flagellate themselves, you know. And it turns out, that there are things in there that are quite amazing, that the initial grace is given to us by God—in fact there's a condemnation in there for anyone who says that our works depart from grace. This is—I thought to myself, "I have not been told—I had been misinformed."¹³

And I don't know what he had been misinformed about; there's no conspiracy; there's no exhortation certainly to poke one's eyes out or engage in self-flagellation, but there is something far, far worse in my opinion. Multiple times those who hold to a biblical faith are anathematized by the Council of Trent. Now don't misunderstand; it isn't our views that are condemned; it's we ourselves. There's a big difference between saying (and I going to very loosely paraphrase Canon 24):

If you believe that you are saved purely by grace through faith in Christ, and works are an evidence of that salvation and in no way cause or increase it, *your heresy is anathema*.

There's a big difference between saying that and:

If you believe that you are saved purely by grace through faith in Christ, and works are an evidence of that salvation and in no way cause or increase it, *let you be anathema*.

Big difference!

"Anathema" is from the Greek word $\alpha\nu\alpha\theta\epsilon\mu\alpha$, "accursed," "to be condemned" (by God). If you compare Paul's use in Romans, chapter nine, verse 3, it's to be separated from Christ, hence, eternally condemned. I don't know about you, but I would much rather stick pins in my eyes and

¹²D'Aubigne.

¹³Stand To Reason.

self-flagellate myself than be condemned to eternal hell or see those I love thus condemned, but Dr. Beckwith has chosen to gloss over that part. If you doubt that this is what Trent means, I counted about two dozen . . . times that I have been anathematized by the Council of Trent alone. And most of you believe like I do on these essential matters, if not all of you, and so, you're in the same boat. And if you doubt that that's what this means, there's a creed that Trent formulated and it's called "The Creed of the Council of Trent," published in 1564. And this is a vow that a faithful Catholic is to adhere unto. It reads in part:

. . . I accept Sacred Scripture according to the meaning which has been held by holy Mother Church and which she now holds. . . . I embrace and accept each and every article on original sin and justification declared and defined in the most holy Council of Trent. I likewise profess that in the mass a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice is offered to God on behalf of the living and the dead, and that the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, and that there is a change of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into blood; and this change the Catholic Church calls transubstantiation. I firmly hold that there is a purgatory, and that the souls detained there are helped by the prayers of the faithful. I likewise hold that the saints reigning together with Christ should be honored and invoked, that they offer prayers to God on our behalf, and that their relics should be venerated. I firmly assert that images of Christ, of the Mother of God ever Virgin, and of the other saints should be given to that due honor and veneration should be given to them. I affirm the power of indulgences was left in the keeping of the Church by Christ, and that the use of indulgences is very beneficial to Christians. . . . I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Pontiff, vicar of Christ and successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. . . .

And it concludes:

. . . I unhesitatingly accept and profess all the doctrines (especially those concerning the primacy of the Roman pontiff and his infallible teaching authority) . . .

Now if you were listening carefully, those of you with a little more historical acumen, may say, "Well, wait a minute, that sounds out of place—especially those [things] concerning the primacy of the Roman pontiff and his infallible teaching authority. That's the Council of Trent that was written in the 1500s; the whole issue of infallibility didn't come about until the 1800s. And if you did notice that, you go to the head of the class because that's true. That parenthesis, and there was another one, at least, was added later. It was added by order of Pope Pious IX following Vatican I, which made papal infallibility dogma. In 1877, Pope Pious IX demanded that certain additions be made to a document that was written over 300 years earlier, the Council of Trent. So the original says:

. . . I unhesitatingly accept and profess all the doctrines . . .

Pope Pious says, "Add this:"

... (especially those concerning the primacy of the Roman pontiff and his infallible teaching authority) handed down, defined, and explained by the sacred canons and ecumenical councils . . .

And then he added:

... (and by the ecumenical Vatican Council). And at the same time I condemn, reject, and anathematize everything that is contrary to those propositions, and all heresies without exception that have been condemned, rejected, and anathematized by the Church.

That includes those things that the Reformers hold, held, those things that we hold dear.

And then:

I, ___ promise, vow, and swear that, with God's help, I shall most constantly hold and profess this true Catholic faith, *outside of which no one can be saved* and which I now freely profess and truly hold.¹⁴

This is no insignificant issue. Where does one go to hear the voice of God? (We're talking about eternity.) Where does one go to learn the truth of the Gospel as it relates to what God's demands are and what God's plan is as it relates to the salvation of sinners? *Where do you go?* Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice." Well, what's the objective standard for that voice? Is it the Word of God in the self-authenticated Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, or is it that which comes through the voices of traditions of men?

When we looked at this a few weeks ago as we examined papal infallibility, we noted that even that topic is still debated among Roman Catholics. What is the extent of papal infallibility? Tim Staples is a Protestant convert to Romanism who is a rather well-known Catholic apologist. In a lecture he delivered on papal infallibility, he challenges the idea that the pope must only be obeyed when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is "from the throne." In other words, he's contending, as do many, many, many other Catholics, that the pope must always be obeyed, no questions asked. And he speaks of his response to a priest who had affirmed his idea of a limited papal infallibility, and Staples says, when this priest conveyed that to him, he said:

You know and I almost fell over. I'm like, 'have you read anything from the documents of the church—have you read anything?' How about *Unum Sanctum* which was written in the fourteenth century? It says we are bound not by just what the pope teaches about faith and morals, but juridically. Whatever the pope says you and I are bound to. If he says tomorrow we are going to say mass in Swahili in the United States, he has the authority to do that and we are bound to obey. Have you ever heard this? – 'I love the papacy; I love the pope. But

¹⁴Emphasis Mine.

only when he speaks ex cathedra. If he's not speaking ex cathedra then I don't have to obey him, I can do whatever I want.' That is a heresy, folks, that is a heresy from way back.¹⁵

Who or what do we trust? The Word of God? The word of Rome? Or, if not the word of Rome, how about Constantinople or Alexandria? Maybe Salt Lake City, or Brooklyn, New York? Or Unity Village in Missouri where the Unity School of Christianity is located? Or New Knoxville, Ohio, headquarters for The Way International? Maybe it was the Branch Davidian Compound in Waco, Texas, and we all just missed it? And I can hear someone object, "Well, you see the very reason we have all of these cults is because of sola scriptura." No, my friend, that's not true. These groups don't believe in sola scriptura; they believe, as does Rome, in an authoritarianism that inoculates one against thinking for himself, from being a believer-priest, something that we see so clearly outlined about believers in the New Testament. We saw it in 1 Peter. False teachings and damning error are nothing new. False views of God plagued Old Testament Israel just as it did during the times of Christ and the apostles.

Again, what is the standard by which we judge truth and error? As Christians, how do we determine whether a teaching or a doctrine is true or false, if it's from God or men? The apostle Paul talked about those who taught doctrines of demons. How are we to recognize those demonic doctrines? What's the standard? If you go back to the Jews in the Old Testament, we find that it is the written law. That was the standard. The Jews were regularly warned against false prophets, false voices that would impersonate that of God. Deuteronomy, chapter thirteen warns that even if a prophet performs some sign or wonder—a miracle—but his message leads one away from the worship of Yahweh, that person was to be rejected and put to death. My friends, what happened at Fatima? Some great wonder happened. What was the message of Fatima? Worship Yahweh? Worship and proclaim the name of Jesus Christ? No, "May the holy mother of God, the perpetual virgin, may her name be honored throughout the whole earth." If the prophet performs some sign or wonder, a miracle, but his message leads one away from the worship of Yahweh, that person was to be rejected under the Old Testament economy and put to death. As Israel's canon of Scripture was being completed, the law, the prophets, and the writings (those are the three categories) became the standard of conduct. The law, the prophets, the writings correspond to what we have in our Bibles, 39 books of the Old Testament. That was the standard for Israel. And we see that during the earthly ministry of Jesus; He constantly held the Jews accountable to that written standard. Matthew 21:42:

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

¹⁵Cited by James White, transcribed from an MP3 copy of a debate on papal infallibility with Tim Staples.

Matthew 22:29:

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God."

Matthew, chapter four, verse 4, when tempted by Satan:

But He answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

In fact, in Matthew, chapter 4, that passage, that chapter that chronicles the temptation of Jesus Christ by the enemy, He responds to the three-fold temptation of Satan by three times quoting Scripture (three times quoting a passage out of Deuteronomy).

We could go on. Matthew, chapter fifteen, verse 6:

' . . . he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Luke 11:27 and 28, and I think these last two passages are certainly relevant, especially to Roman Catholics:

And it came about while He said these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice, and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed." But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it."

After the death and resurrection of Christ, during the embryonic stage of the church, we read of the Christians in Berea, who in Acts 17:11 are commended as being:

. . . more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

What things? The teachings of the apostle Paul! Listen, these Christians in Berea were engaging in private interpretation, something that's forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church. They had the audacity to question the teaching of an apostle of Jesus Christ, and yet, they're commended for all eternity in Sacred Scripture for doing just that. They're called noble-minded. These Bereans should have been excommunicated, according to Rome, for doing what they did.

The Catholic Encyclopedia of 1917 under the topic "Religious discussions" says this:

It is not, then, surprising that the question of disputations with heretics has been made the subject of ecclesiastical legislation. By a decree of Alexander IV (1254-1261) inserted in

"Sextus Decretalium", (Lib. V, c. ii), and still in force, all laymen are forbidden, under threat of excommunication, to dispute publicly or privately with heretics on the Catholic Faith.

Heretics? That includes us! The text reads:

We furthermore forbid any lay person to engage in dispute, either private or public, concerning the Catholic Faith. Whosoever shall act contrary to this decree, let him be bound in the fetters of excommunication. This law, like all penal laws, must be very narrowly construed. The terms Catholic Faith and dispute have a technical signification. The former term refers to questions purely theological; the latter to disputations more or less formal, and engrossing the attention of the public. There are numerous questions, somewhat connected with theology, which many laymen who have received no scientific theological training can treat more intelligently than a priest. . . . But when there is a question of dogmatic or moral theology, every intelligent layman will concede the propriety of leaving the exposition and defence of it to the clergy.

That seems to pretty much shut the door of this whole parade of lay-Catholic apologists!

The Bible was given to the church; the church isn't giving us the Bible; the Bible was given to an elect bride of Christ—was given to every believer-priest. And of course somebody's going to say, "Well, they might interpret the Bible." Yes, people misinterpret the Scriptures. Individuals do, but so do authorities and that's just a fact. Peter talked about that in 2 Peter 3:16:

as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort . . .

That is, Paul's letters, Paul's writings.

. . . as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

But another tenet of the study of logic is that the abuse of something does not negate it's proper use. The fact that lots of things, [such as] drugs, are abused, does that mean that we throw away all drugs? The fact that people twist the Scriptures, sometimes to their own demise, does not mean we are not accountable to rightly divide the Word of truth and that God, by His Spirit, will not insure that on the basics, the essentials, we don't.

We come to a huge question at this point, and it's this: Did the Roman Catholic Church give us the Bible? Did the Roman Catholic Church give us the Bible? This is a common argument among defenders of Roman Catholicism against the doctrine of sola scriptura, and it usually goes like this—I'm going to have you picture a conversation between Greg, an Evangelical Christian, and Peter, a Roman Catholic—it goes like this:

Greg: "Peter, I believe that the Bible is the final authority, therefore, I must reject much of what the Roman Catholic Church teaches.

Peter: "Well, Greg, what do you mean by the Bible?"

Greg answers: "You know, the Old and New Testaments."

Peter: "How many books are in those Old and New Testaments?"

Greg replies: "Well, there are 39 books in the Old Testament; 27 in the New."

To which, Peter says, zeroing in on poor Greg: "How do you know that? I mean, how do you know that your Bible has the correct books in it? There are lots of other writings out there that have claimed to be God's Word. What authority can you point to to tell you that you have the right Bible?"

Greg: "I don't know; I'm not sure about that."

Peter closes by saying: "You see, all you can claim is a fallible list of infallible books. And in the end, you can have no confidence that any book of your Bible is infallible, because you can have no assurance that it's part of God's Word. In the Roman Catholic Church, I have that authority that has given us the Bible and has infallibly defined what books are canonical and what books are not."

How would you answer that?

Beckwith appeals to this same line of argumentation. He writes:

. . . because a list of canonical books is itself not found in scripture—as one can find the Ten Commandments or the names of Christ's Apostles—any such list, whether Protestant or Catholic, would be an item of extra-biblical theological knowledge.¹⁶

And he goes on:

. . . the belief that the Bible consists only of 66 books is not a claim of scripture—since one cannot find the list in it—but a claim about scripture as a whole. That is, the whole has a property—'consisting of 66 books'—that is not found in any of the parts. In other words, if the 66 books are the supreme authority on matters of belief, and the number of books is a belief, and one cannot find that belief in any of the books, then the belief that scripture consists of 66 particular books is an extra-biblical belief.¹⁷

I think I could say it much more clearly, with all due respect, than Dr. Beckwith. And I can say it with more brevity. All we have, if I were speaking for Rome, all we have, as Evangelicals, is a fallible list of infallible books, since we didn't have an infallible council like they did to give us an infallible number of those infallible books. This is the argument that Rome gave us the Bible. She was there to recognize which books were inspired and which were not, and since we don't recognize

¹⁶*Return to Rome*, 123.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

Rome's authority, we're simply schismatics with no absolute certainty that the Bible we hold has the right books in it.

There's a greater matter involved here. We refer to this as the canonicity issue. The word "canon" is from the Hebrew word *kaneh*, a rod. The Greek word *kanon*, reed, referred to a rod, a stick, a reed, something that was used to measure something else. We might picture a yardstick or a ruler. It was a standard. As it relates to Scripture, when we talk about the canon, when we talk about canonicity, we're talking about the authenticity of the books themselves. The canon equals the 66 books of our English Bible, no more, no less. The question becomes How certain can we be that the 66 books we have is the correct canon? Listen, it's simplistic and it's historically inaccurate to say that the Roman Catholic Church gave us all the Bible. That, my friends, is an historical anachronism. The Roman Catholic Church was not around to do so, that is their de facto assumption: "We were there." Were they there for the canonization of the Old Testament Scriptures? And that's where we have to start, the canon of the Old Testament.

Long before the Roman Catholic Church came upon the scene, the Jews had a fixed canon. Now according to ancient Jewish writings, what you see, and even today, their canon consists of, depending on how they divide them up, 22 or 24 books. Now, you say, "Well, wait, we've got 39 books." That's because we break all of the minor prophets apart into separate books, as well as 1st and 2nd Kings, 1st and 2nd Samuel and there are some others; they joined a lot of those together. But when you look at their 22—their list of 22, more common—or sometimes 24, they're the same as our 39 books. The same content is there, just broken up a little differently. And they come under three headings:

- The Law (Torah): Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy.
- The Prophets (Neviim): Joshua; Judges; 1st and 2nd Samuel (one book); 1st and 2nd Kings (one book); Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; and the 12 Minor Prophets (one book).
- The Writings (Kethubim): Psalms; Proverbs; Job; Ruth; Song of Solomon; Ecclesiastes; Lamentations; Esther; Daniel; Ezra and Nehemiah (one book); 1st and 2nd Chronicles (one book).

So these 24 in this case parallel the 39 we have in our Old Testament. These books were accepted by the time of Jesus and note this: nowhere in the Old Testament would a Jew find a list of what books were to be part of the Old Testament. So Beckwith's argument is a red herring. How did a Jew living hundreds of years before Christ know that the books of Deuteronomy or Isaiah were Scripture? If it's asserted that we have to have an infallible understanding of what Scripture is, how did a Jew have that same understanding without the aid of Rome? Plus, the Jews did not accept the canon that Rome has now infallibly defined since Trent with their addition of the Apocrypha. How did Timothy know what Paul meant when he said, "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." ¹⁸ And yet, Jesus often appealed to the authority of Scripture and held men accountable to it. And nobody's running off, saying, "Well, Lord, do you know that that's really Scripture?" Or anyone else, for that matter. From

¹⁸2 Timothy 3:16.

that perspective it would seem obvious that an infallible authority like the Roman Catholic Church is not needed today, since Jesus held men responsible to the Scriptures then. In fact, Jesus, Himself, gives a wonderful defense of the Hebrew canon of Scripture in Matthew, chapter twenty-three, verses 34-35, and Luke, chapter eleven, verses 49-51. Both of those passages state that the Jewish nation will be held responsible for the blood of the prophets, "from the blood of Abel" (that's Genesis 4:8, the first recorded murder) "to the blood of Zachariah" (that's 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, the last recorded murder." Now in the Hebrew canon, Genesis is the first book, like our Bibles, but as our Bibles have Malachi as the last book of the Old Testament, in the Hebrew Bible it's 2nd Chronicles. So Jesus was sort of encompassing the whole canon when He said, "the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah." That's "A to Z;" it's Genesis to Malachi as we would put it.

So in light of this F. F. Bruce wrote that, "No body of literature ever had its credentials confirmed by a higher authority than that of Christ."¹⁹

The question comes up about the Apocrypha. The word "apocrypha" means "hidden." It refers to the 14 books written during the intertestamental period, or the 400 year interlude between Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, and John the Baptist. In the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church officially adopted the Apocrypha as part of Sacred Scripture. It was made part of the Bible, or as they would say, it was simply recognized and that they put their stamp of authority upon it. Now, Beckwith claims that the inclusion of these books into the Bible is a foregone fact. He writes that:

. . . most Christians in the world, both East and West, belong to communions that accept the Catholic canon, which was the canon recognized by the local councils of Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage III (AD 397). . . . [N]o synod, council, or body within Western or Eastern Christendom explicitly rejected these books as non-canonical prior to the Reformers doing so in the sixteenth century.²⁰

That is a very simplistic argument, because these books were rejected by the Jews as being canonical. Neither the Palestinian nor Alexandrian Jews recognized them as being part of the Law, Prophets, or Writings. And Jesus did not recognize them, and that's [significant].

According to British scholar, Brian Edwards, speaking of the Apocrypha:

They were never considered part of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures. The Jews clearly ruled them out by the confession that throughout that period, the period between Malachai and Matthew (a period of about 400 years), there was no voice of the prophets in the land. Josephus the historian never used them as Scripture. And very significantly, Jesus and the

¹⁹Cited in Paul D. Wegner, 109.

²⁰*Return to Rome*, 122. The word "explicitly" carries a wide range of nuance.

Apostles never quoted from the Apocrypha. And on that authority alone we would say they should never be added to the Bible.²¹

Yes, according to Jewish tradition, there was no prophetic voice during that 400 year intertestamental period. And that's why it's sometimes referred to as the 400 silent years. New books were not being added to the Scriptures. The Apocrypha itself testifies to this in 1st Maccabees. Simon Maccabees speaks of the great sorrow in Israel such as there had not been since the prophets ceased to appear to them, *because* the prophets ceased to appear (9:27). In the Pseudepigrapha, the author of 2nd Baruch claims that the prophets had fallen asleep. No prophetic voice.

I know it's claimed that some of the church fathers accepted the apocryphal letters as canonical, but even that deserves some clarification. The early church fathers had two different traditions regarding the canon of the Old Testament. One tradition was very broad and it included all of the Jewish writings that were read in the churches for edification. That included the Apocrypha and also some other works that the Roman Catholic Church does not accept. So there was a broader view that probably had two tiers to it. At one level, it was the purity of the Old Testament Scriptures that we view as canonical; at another level they viewed it as canonical, but secondary, those ancient Jewish writings that were helpful to be read for the edification of the church. They were useful in liturgy and worship. This was the position, I believe, of Augustine. The other canon tradition was very narrow and claimed that only those books in the Jewish Bible—our 39—only those are Scripture. This was the position of apostolic and early church fathers, like Melito of Sardis, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Epiphanius, as well. It was the position of Jerome. Now remember, Jerome put together the Latin Vulgate, which was the accepted Bible of the church for 1000 years before the King James Version came along, or the Geneva Bible came along. This was the standard version of the Bible. It's still the accepted foundation for the Scriptures in the Roman Catholic Church. So you have Jerome, he comes along and puts together the Latin Vulgate, which included the Apocrypha, yet Jerome makes a distinction between canonical and apocryphal books. He was convinced that there were 22 books in the Old Testament canon and he said, "These correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet." Now again, his 22 parallels what we have in content to our 39.

Some argue from the Septuagint. Remember, that was the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It was completed by about 100 B.C. and some will argue, "Well, look the Septuagint had the Apocrypha in it." That was the Bible that the apostles used. There's debate, however, as to which books were part of the original Septuagint. The earliest copies we have date to the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. So we're talking some 500 years after the fact, and these copies contain some of the Apocrypha, but not all of it. Paul Wegner, a friend of mine, an Old Testament scholar and textual critic, writes:

²¹Brian Edwards, *Why 66 Books*, DVD.

Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, shows no evidence that apocryphal books were included in the Hebrew canon. Rather they were probably added later by Christians who were unfamiliar with the Hebrew canon.²²

And Dr. Wegner goes on to list ten compelling reasons to reject the Apocrypha. These are in your handout. (I wish we could have maybe put more up on the board or had more in the handout. I know it's sometimes hard to follow a lot of these quotes and whatnot.) But he lists these, ten compelling reasons to reject the Apocrypha:

1. The New Testament never cites any apocryphal books as inspired; Jesus' usage of Scripture suggests that only the books in the Hebrew Bible were thought to be authoritative (Matt. 23:34-35; Luke 11:50-51).
2. None of the apocryphal books claim to be the word of the Lord as do many Old Testament books . . .
3. The Old Testament canon is confirmed by many sources: 2 Esdras 4:45- 48 (24 books); Josephus *Contra Apion* 1.7-8 §§37-42 (22 books); Melito (all Old Testament books except possibly Esther); Jerusalem List (all 39 books); Origen (22 books). Each of these sources list the same 39 Old Testament books as we have today (except possibly Melito, who omits Esther).
4. There is little evidence to suggest that two different canons originated in Palestine and in Egypt. In fact, Philo, a Jew from Alexandria, never quotes from an apocryphal book as authoritative.
5. There are significant historical inaccuracies in the Apocrypha. . . .

In other words, there are errors. There are doctrinal and historical and chronological errors. Dr. Wegner gives an example:

For example, the events in the Book of Tobit (1:3-5) are chronologically incompatible—Tobit is said to live in Nineveh about 722 B.C., and yet also saw the division of the united kingdom in 931 B.C.

6. There are theological inconsistencies; for example 2 Maccabees 12:43- 45 espouses praying for the dead, but canonical books maintain that decisions about one's eternal destiny can only be made before death (Heb. 9:27).
7. Many early church fathers spoke against the canonicity of much or all of the Apocrypha (Melito, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Jerome); no major church father accepted all of the apocryphal books until Augustine, the apocryphal books have never been universally accepted by the church.
8. The earliest list of the Old Testament canon by Melito (c. 170) does not include the Apocrypha.

²²Paul D. Wegner, 109.

9. Jerome, the most qualified Hebrew scholar in his time, argued against the canonicity of the Apocrypha.
10. During the Council of Trent, Martin Luther argued against the canonicity of the Book of Maccabees, citing the New Testament, early church fathers, and Jewish teachers in support. The Roman Catholic Church responded by canonizing the Apocrypha.²³

The reason why they were canonized is because they supported pagan teachings, like praying for the dead and purgatory. Interestingly, the Reformers even cited Augustine against the Roman Catholic Church. Augustine said of the book of Maccabees, "The Jews do not esteem this [writing] as the Law and the Prophets, to which the Lord bears witness."²⁴

Old Testament scholar R. K. Harrison says that:

In all its essentials the canon was most probably complete by about 300 B.C., and while discussion concerning certain component parts was continued well into the Christian era, the substance of the canon as it existed a century and a half after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah remained unaffected by these controversies.²⁵

[As for the] New Testament, the earliest available list comes from what's called the Muratorian Canon and dates to about 150 A.D. The Muratorian Canon includes the four Gospels; Acts; 13 letters of Paul; two, perhaps three, letters of John; Jude; and Revelation. It doesn't have James and Hebrews, 1st and 2nd Peter, although we know that 1st Peter was widely accepted at this time, so that may have been an oversight. These books are said to have been accepted at that time by the universal church.

We [also] have Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp (who was a disciple of John). So we're just one generation removed from an apostle. Irenaeus was born in Asia, which was in modern-day Turkey, and moved to Rome and became bishop of Lyon in 177 A.D. He came into contact with the leading Gnostic heretics and set out writing his huge volume against heresies. He was well acquainted with all the churches of the Roman Empire and he knew which books were accepted as sacred Scripture. Irenaeus quotes over 1000 passages of Scripture from all but four or five New Testament books and calls them (quantifies them) as the Scriptures given, *not by the church*, but given by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ The only exceptions, the only ones he doesn't explicitly mention are Philemon (a very short book), 3 John (a very short book), 2 Peter, Hebrews, Jude, and perhaps James

²³Wegner, 126.

²⁴Wegner, footnote on page 412.

²⁵Cited in Wegner, page 106.

²⁶The Roman Catholic argument regarding canonization cuts both ways. How did Irenaeus know that the words he was quoting against his foes was New Testament Scripture?

(there may be some allusions to James). It doesn't mean he didn't know them or he didn't recognize them, he just simply didn't use them.

Again, to quote Brian Edwards talking about the New Testament:

In addition to the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and thirteen letters of Paul were all accepted without question from the earliest records known today. Apart from James, Jude, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Hebrews and Revelation all other new Testament books had been universally accepted by AD 180. Only a few churches hesitated over these seven.²⁷

By 240 A.D., Origen of Alexandria lists all 27 New Testament books, which he quantifies as Scripture. This is way before the Councils of Hippo, Carthage; way before the Roman Catholic Church came upon the scene. We can go even after that a 100 years later, A.D. 325, Eusebius of Caesarea who was an advisor to Constantine and was considered the first church historian, did some research to find out *what the churches of his day accepted* as New Testament Scripture, and he lists 22 of the books as being accepted without hesitation and five books (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John) were widely recognized. So it was all coming together. It was in A.D. 367 that Athanasius was the first to list the 27 New Testament books that's identical to ours, and he calls them:

These are the fountains of salvation, that whoever thirsts, may be satisfied by the eloquence which is in them. In them alone is set forth the doctrine of piety. Let no one add to them, nor take anything from them.

That was the first list, but we knew that long before this those books were accepted by the churches. They were gathered together by the churches before the council of Carthage in 397. A council did not make the canon.

You can go into the four century and you find quotes such as that given by Basil of Caesarea. He died about 379 and in response to false teachers who claimed their own authority over those that Basil recognized, he wrote:

If custom is to be taken in proof of what is right, then it is certainly competent for me to put forward on my side the custom which obtains here. If they reject this, we are clearly not bound to follow them. Therefore, let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favor of that side will be cast the vote of truth.²⁸

²⁷Brian Edwards, *Why 66 Books?* DVD.

²⁸Letter CLXXXIX. Again we ask, how did Basil or his opponents know the extent of the "God-inspired Scripture" that was to establish the truth?

That's clearly a statement in favor of what we would refer to as sola scriptura. They didn't need some institutional church to come along and say, "We're the authority and we have the official list. It dropped from heaven onto our shoulders." No! The process for the New Testament parallels that of the Old Testament: it was under the sovereign work of God. And even Josephus, the Jewish historian, reflecting on the Old Testament in his *Contra Apion*, brings out four principles that the Jews have used that guided them:

- The writings were consistent. They didn't contain contradictions and errors.
- They had prophetic authority; they were written by a prophet.
- They were given by inspiration.
- They were universally received by the people of Israel.

And we see a similar such process in the New Testament. There the church was looking for consistency. Did they have any doctrinal errors in them? Any historical errors? Did they have apostolic authority behind them. Were they given by inspiration? Were they received by the church? You see, the canon—Old Testament, New Testament—came together under the providential working of God. He worked through history by showing that only His word is θεοπνευστος (2 Timothy 3:16), only His word is "God-breathed." We call this *the self-authenticating nature of Scripture*.

No church creates the canon. The church can only recognize what God has inspired. Did you get that? It's a matter of recognition, not creation. As Luther well noted:

The church of God has no power to establish any article of faith; nor has it ever established any; nor will it ever establish any. . . . The church of God has no power to confirm articles or precepts or the Holy Writings as by a higher sanction or judicial authority; nor has it ever done this; nor will it ever do it. Rather, the church of God is approved and confirmed by the Holy Writings as by a higher and judicial authority.

The church can only recognize that which God has inspired. Greg Bahnsen wrote:

Accordingly, the canon is not the product of the Christian church. The church has no authority to control, create, or define the Word of God. . . . When we understand this, we can see how erroneous it is to suppose that the corporate church, at some council of its leaders, voted on certain documents and constituted them the canon. The church cannot subsequently attribute authority to certain writings. It can simply receive them as God's revealed word which, as such, always has been the church's canon. Authority is inherent in those writings from the outset, and the church simply confesses this to be the case.²⁹

Yes, the elect, the sheep of Jesus Christ hear His voice. Those who aren't His, do not hear His voice. Those who are not His, therefore, need some external guide to lead them. However, the external

²⁹Greg Bahnsen, article entitled "The Concept and Importance of Canonicity."

guide is as blind as the one being guided. Those who are the Lord's hear His voice. How else could Paul say things such as 1 Thessalonians 4:9:

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.

In other words, it's written into your hearts. 1 John 2:27 says much the same thing:

And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

There's so much that I wish we had time to look at. I'd love to look at 2 Timothy 3:14-17, which talks about the fact that Scripture is θεοπνευστος, the Scripture is God's inspired and inerrant word. Thus the Scripture alone is the final authority— and that fact alone is self-authenticating. If Scripture is the very Word of God, it must be, by the nature of the fact, absolutely authoritative. Nothing else may contradict it, for God cannot lie. And Christ does not change. Nothing else need to augment it, for it alone is the Word of God.

On March 9th of 1999, Wolf Blitzer was interviewing Vice President Al Gore on CNN's Late Edition regarding his bid for the Democratic Nomination to run for the President of the United States. Blitzer asked this question. He said:

Why should Democrats, looking at the Democratic nomination process, support you instead of Bill Bradley, a friend of yours, a former colleague in the Senate? What do you have to bring to this that he doesn't necessarily bring to this process?

And Gore responded:

I've traveled to every part of this country during the last six years. During my service in the United States Congress, *I took the initiative in creating the Internet.*³⁰

Now, in all fairness, Al Gore did pass legislation that was helpful in building the worldwide web and his quote was more of a gaffe than an outright statement of accomplishment. But it has gone down in history as an example of a kind of opportunism, an opportunism that is common in politics. [It's] an opportunism that says, "All that is good and noble I've accomplished or helped to accomplish." And I can't help but think of that when I think of the Church of Rome: "We gave you genuine Christianity. We are the hope you have of getting to heaven. We were there to create the Bible and give that to you." You can bring up the Crusades, the Inquisitions where thousands of Christians

³⁰www.cnn.com/allpolitics/stories/1999/03/09/president.2000/transcript.gore/index.html, accessed June 4, 2009. Emphasis mine. Compare wiki.answers.com/Q/Did_Al_Gore_really_say_he_invented_the_internet.

were tortured and put to death. You can bring up all the contradictions, the anti-Semitism, the scandals, the politics and like a Teflon Don, "Oh, no, we gave you the Bible and we gave you all things good, but we weren't officially responsible for those bad things." And yet the proof is in the pudding. Dead religion with no ability to regenerate the heart, that's Roman Catholicism. Thank God we've been born again through that imperishable seed, the living and abiding word of God, as we're told in 1 Peter, chapter one, verse 23. Jesus' sheep hear His voice. Scripture is not a dead letter.

Luther said:

The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold on me. The Bible is not antique, or modern. It is eternal.

Luther also said, "The Word comes first, and with the Word the Spirit breathes upon my heart so that I believe."

[Closing Prayer]