

The Early Church Fathers on Scripture

The Early Fathers taught that the Scriptures are inspired, infallible and not subject to private interpretation. They believed that the Scriptures were materially sufficient. Material Sufficiency simply means that everything that is necessary for our faith is contained in the pages of Scripture. However, this does not rule out the role of the Church or Sacred Tradition as they are both found in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Material Sufficiency differs from the Protestant idea of Formal Sufficiency. Formal sufficiency is the idea that a Christian only needs a Bible. No interpreter is needed. This, of course, contradicts 2 Peter 1:20: "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation."

Clement of Rome

Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit (*Letter to the Corinthians* 45 [A.D. 98]).

Justin Martyr

But when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them (*First Apology* 36 [A.D. 155]).

Irenaeus

Since, therefore, the tradition from the apostles does thus exist in the Church, and is permanent among us, let us revert to the Scriptural proof furnished by those apostles who did also write the Gospel, in which they recorded the doctrine regarding God, pointing out that our Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, and that no lie is in Him (*Against Heresies* 3:5:1 [A.D. 189]).

Clement of Alexandria

But they, safeguarding the true tradition of the blessed teaching, which comes straight from the Apostles Peter, James, John and Paul and transmitted from father to son have come down to us with the help of God to deposit in us those ancestral and apostolic seeds (*Stromata* 1:11 [A.D. 202]).

For those are slothful who, having it in their power to provide themselves with proper proofs for the divine Scriptures from the Scriptures themselves, select only what contributes to their own pleasures. And those have a craving for glory who voluntarily evade, by arguments of a diverse sort, the things delivered by the blessed apostles and teachers, which are wedded to inspired words; opposing the divine tradition by human teachings, in order to establish the heresy (*ibid* 7:16 [A.D. 202]).

Hippolytus of Rome

They have treated the Divine Scriptures recklessly and without fear. They have set aside the rule of ancient faith... But how daring this offense is, it is not likely that they themselves are ignorant. For either they do not believe that the Divine Scriptures were spoken by the Holy Spirit, and thus are unbelievers, or else they think themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and in that case what else are they than demoniacs? (*Against Artemon* [A.D. 230]). Fragment in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:28:15:18 [A.D. 325]).

Cyril of Jerusalem

But in learning the Faith and in professing it, acquire and keep that only, which is now delivered to thee by the Church, and which has been built up strongly out of all the Scriptures. (*Catechetical Lectures* 5:12 [A.D. 350]).

Athanasius of Alexandria

But since they allege the divine oracles and force on them a misinterpretation, according to their private sense, it becomes necessary to meet them just so far as to vindicate these passages, and to show that they bear an orthodox sense, and that our opponents are in error. (*Discourse Against the Arians* 1:37 [A.D. 356-360]).

Antony of Egypt

Observe the traditions of the fathers, and chiefly the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which you have learned from the Scripture, and of which you have often been put in mind by me (Athanasius, *The Life of Antony* 10 [A.D. 356-362]).

Hilary of Poitiers

It behooves us not to withdraw from the Creed which we have received...nor to back off from the faith which we have received from through the prophets ... or to back-slide from the Gospels. Once laid down, it continues even to this day through the tradition of the Fathers (Ex. Oper. Hist. Fragment 7, 3 [A.D. 365]).

Epiphanius of Salamis

But for all the divine words, there is no need of allegory to grasp the meaning; what is necessary is study and understanding to know the meaning of each statement. We must have recourse to Tradition, for all cannot be received from the divine Scriptures. That is why the holy Apostles handed down certain things in writings but others by Traditions. As Paul said: "Just as I handed them on to you." (*Panarion* 61:6 [A.D. 376]).

Basil the Great

Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us in a mystery by the tradition of the apostles; and both of these in relation to true religion have the same force (*On the Holy Spirit* 27:66 [A.D. 375]).

John Chrysostom

As a trusty door, Scripture shuts out heretics, securing us from error... (*Joann.* 58).

"So then brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Hence it is manifest, that they did not deliver all things by epistle, but many things also unwritten, and in like manner both the one and the other are worthy of credit. Therefore let us think the tradition of the Church also worthy of credit. It is a tradition, seek no farther (*Homilies on Second Thessalonians* [circa A.D. 400]).

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Augustine of Hippo

For Holy Scripture fixes the rule for our doctrine, lest we dare to be wiser than we ought. (*On the Good of Widowhood* 2 [A.D. 414]).

But those reasons which I have here given, I have either gathered from the authority of the church, according to the tradition of our forefathers, or from the testimony of the divine Scriptures (*On the Holy Trinity* 4:6:10 [A.D. 400-416]).

Vincent of Lerins

We must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church (*Commonitory* 2:4 [A.D. 434]).