

## **Why 1 Corinthians 4:6 cannot be a basis for sola scriptura:**

1 Cor 4:6 (KJV) states: “And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.”

Does this say “Scripture alone is the ultimate, divine authority in all matters pertaining to religion”?

No.

In order to understand pretty much any verse in the Bible, a person must read it in context with the chapter, book or sometimes even other passages in the Bible. 1 Cor 4:6 necessitates a reading of much more than verse 6 and actually more than chapter 4.

Historical context is necessary here as well. Bible historians believe Paul first brought the Good News to Corinth in 51 A.D. He then traveled to Ephesus while disciples took over the teaching of Christianity to the Corinthians. About 5 years passed, then Paul caught word of some problems (including divisions) back in Corinth, so he wrote 1 Corinthians in an effort to get them back on track. Historians believe the 1st Letter to the Corinthians was written in 55 or 56 A.D.

As for scriptural context: The divisions in Corinth were caused by some Christians who stressed Paul’s teaching as superior to Apollos’ or Peter’s teaching over Paul’s. Different groups were letting their pride and emotions get in the way of truth. Sounds familiar doesn’t it? Paul was writing the Corinthians to tell them that they cannot pick some teachings and reject others but that they, as Christians, must remain united and imitate him (Paul), who was a humble servant of God. Note that Paul was not telling the Corinthians to imitate scripture, but to imitate a fellow human being.

Therefore, when in verse 6, he says, “which is written”, scholars disagree on the meaning. Some say he’s referring to scripture and other say he is referring to documents he himself had written or may write in the future.

I agree with the scholars who say Paul was referring to his own writings (some of which are apparently not scripture). We know that Paul wrote other letters that have been lost and that some of them were to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:9, 2 Cor 2:3-4 & 2 Cor 13:1), so he could be referring to the contents of those lost letters or other writings of his that were not inspired. He may be referring to other letters written by people such as Peter, Apollos or one of the apostles, which have also been lost.

Could he have been referring to scripture? Possibly, but certainly not all of Scripture. Given the date of this letter and the scripture references elsewhere in his writings, it is most likely that Paul was referring only to the Old Testament in verse 6. But if we say this is a declaration of “Sola Scriptura”, we are saying that he was directing the Christians to follow the Jewish canon and therefore, reject a lot of Christianity. Additionally, If this were the case, Paul himself would be violating his very own maxim by writing something new. We know neither of these can be true.

Might Paul have been referring to some New Testament books as well in verse 6? This isn't possible for the vast majority of the New Testament books. By 56 A.D., only 4 NT books had been written. These include Galatians, 1st & 2nd Thessalonians and the Gospel of Mark. However Mark's Gospel was likely written at the same time as the 1st Letter to the Corinthians, which makes it unlikely that Paul would have even known about its existence, much less its contents. I think it is implausible that he was just referring to 1 Corinthians and the other 4 books that were in existence by then and here's why:

If Paul was telling the Corinthians not to go beyond what has been written in the Old Testament and the 4 New Testament books which had been completed by the time of his 1st Letter to the Corinthians, he was eliminating about 85% of the New Testament from the Bible. Then people who subscribe to Sola Scriptura would have to reject 22 books of the New Testament. There would be no 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Romans or Hebrews, etc... Are Galatians, 1st & 2nd Thessalonians, the Gospel of Mark and 1st Corinthians all we need for matters pertaining to religion? How can you say "Scripture is inspired by God" if you can't try and point to 2 Tim 3:16 (which doesn't say "alone" by the way)? How can we know how to conduct ourselves in the house of God if you don't have 1 Tim 3:14-15? How do we even know how or when Christ was born if we only have the Gospel of Mark? Without knowledge of Christ's incarnation, heresies such as Gnosticism would ravage Christian theology.

So, in summary regarding 1 Cor 4:6, it is not supportive of sola scriptura as its application would contradict 2000 years of Christian teaching including the non-Catholic Christian understanding of the inspired Word of God over the past 500 years.