



The doctrine of **Sola Scriptura**, one of the fundamental pillars of the Protestant Reformation, holds that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice for Christians. At first glance, this may seem logical—after all, Sacred Scripture is the inspired Word of God. But is it truly biblical to claim that the Bible is the sole authority?

Interestingly, one of the most frequently cited passages to defend Sola Scriptura is **2 Timothy 3:16-17**:

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

But does this verse actually prove that Scripture is the only source of authority? Let’s analyze it in depth, considering its historical, theological, and present-day relevance.

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## 1. The Context of 2 Timothy 3:16-17

To correctly interpret a biblical passage, we must consider its context. St. Paul wrote this letter to his disciple Timothy, a young bishop in Ephesus, to instruct him in his pastoral ministry during difficult times.

### What Does “Scripture” Refer to in This Passage?

When Paul mentions “all Scripture,” it’s important to remember that at that time, **the New Testament was not yet complete or canonized**. What Timothy understood as “Scripture” referred primarily to the Old Testament.

If 2 Timothy 3:16-17 were interpreted in an absolute sense, it would mean that the Old Testament alone is sufficient for Christian faith, which would be contradictory. In fact, **Paul himself transmitted teachings outside of Scripture**, as we will see later.



## “Useful” Does Not Mean “Sufficient”

The verse states that Scripture is **useful** for teaching, correcting, and instructing, but it does not say that it is the only authority. Something can be useful without being exclusive or sufficient.

For example, water is useful for life, but it is not the only element necessary to live. We also need food, oxygen, and other essentials.

Likewise, Scripture is essential for faith, but it is not the only source of divine teaching.

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## 2. Tradition and the Authority of the Church in the Bible

If Scripture were the only rule of faith, then the Bible itself should teach it clearly. However, paradoxically, **nowhere does the Bible affirm Sola Scriptura**. Instead, Scripture shows that God has established **other sources of authority**.

### A) Jesus Did Not Leave a Book, but a Living Church

Christ did not write any book or leave behind a “manual of faith.” Instead, **He founded a Church with authority to teach**:

*“You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 16:18-19).*

Jesus entrusted His teaching to the Apostles, who transmitted it both orally and in writing.

### B) Apostolic Tradition

St. Paul did not teach only through Scripture but also through oral Tradition:



“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

This clearly shows that apostolic teaching was not limited to Scripture.

### C) The Church as “the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth”

If Scripture were the only authority, we would expect the Bible to say, “Scripture is the pillar and foundation of the truth.” But instead, it states:

“The Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

This means that the Church plays a crucial role in interpreting and transmitting the truth.

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## 3. What Happened Before the Complete Bible Existed?

The New Testament was not written immediately. Jesus ascended to heaven around A.D. 33, but the earliest Gospel (Mark) was written around A.D. 65, and the last book (Revelation) was written around A.D. 95.

### How did early Christians live for the first 30 years without a complete New Testament?

The answer is simple: they followed the oral teachings of the Apostles and the authority of the Church.

The process of canonizing the Bible was not completed until the fourth century when the Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, defined the canon in the Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397).

If Scripture were the only rule of faith, we would have a problem: **how did Christians know**



**which books were inspired without an authoritative body to guide them?**

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## 4. The History and Consequences of Sola Scriptura

The doctrine of Sola Scriptura was introduced by Martin Luther in the 16th century in response to abuses within the Church. However, this doctrine has led to massive fragmentation within Protestant Christianity.

Today, there are over **40,000 Protestant denominations**, each with different interpretations of the Bible. This is because, without a visible authority to interpret Scripture, each person becomes their own judge of truth.

Christ did not desire a divided Church, but one united in truth:

*“That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us” (John 17:21).*

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## 5. The Church’s Teaching Today

The Catholic Church teaches that **Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium** together form a single deposit of faith.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 82) states:

*“The Church does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”*



This means that Scripture is fundamental, but **we need Tradition and the guidance of the Magisterium to interpret it correctly.**

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## **Conclusion: The Bible Is Essential, but Not Sufficient**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 affirms that Scripture is inspired and useful, but it does not say that it is the only authority. The Bible itself shows us that Jesus established a Church with authority to interpret and teach the truth.

Sola Scriptura, rather than being a biblical principle, is a human tradition that has caused division. In contrast, the Catholic teaching—based on Scripture, Tradition, and the Church—is the one that has preserved the faith intact since the time of the Apostles.

The invitation is clear: **let us know Scripture, but also the richness of Tradition and the secure guidance of the Church that Christ founded.** Only then can we fully live the faith that has been handed down to us from the Apostles.