

God's word is also useful for reproof, meaning Scripture shows us what our sin is clarifies for us what sin is, and points us to the remedy of our sin. For example we may think lying is ok, I mean everyone does it. Yet as we engage in scripture it will show us that lying is in fact a sin, has tremendous negative repercussions, but that when we lie, we have a savior who has paid the penalty for that sin, as John says, *"If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*.

And this is because God's word is alive. Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* God's word being a living, God-breathed word it is also useful for **correcting, tearing down lies or false teaching in our lives, and barriers those things we don't want to deal with in our lives.**

Not only does God's word teach, reprove, and correct – **it is also useful for training** us and specifically for training us in righteousness, training Christians to live as God wants us and commands us to live as gospel-transformed and gospel-centered people in His world.

Finally, God's word is not only useful, in verse 17, **we learn it's also practical.** God's word alone is sufficient to make godly men and godly women, godly boys and godly girls **competent and equipped for every good work.** Friends when we seek to nurture our lives in God's word, God will use His word to make you competent that is qualified and equipped, prepared to do whatever tasks God will put before you.

What the Reformers recaptured, and what we must continue to stand on today is that God's word, and God's word alone is the inspired word; inerrant, sufficient, and our final authority for faith and life.

Friends, the word of God alone is our final authority on these matters and so many others, so I have some questions for you. Do you believe what the Bible say, does it have final authority in your life? Do you believe what the Bible says about you, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God? Do you believe that Christ died for your sin according to the scripture, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures? Do you believe that Jesus is the way the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him? It's in the Scriptures we find these answers, and there alone where they are our final authority.

Reformation: Sola Scriptura **2 Timothy 3:15-17**

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As Jesus stands trial in John 18, there is a fascinating exchange between Jesus and his would be judge, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. As Pilate questions Jesus on the accusation the Jewish religious leaders have made that Jesus is engaged in treason claiming to be king of the Jews, Pilate asks in John 18:37-38 (Read) Friends, we live in a world asking that question every moment of every day. What is truth? How do we know what is true? What is the standard of truth? What truth has authority and what does not? In our time we are asked to live one way and not another, to believe one thing and not another, to stand for one thing and not another. But how do we know what we should do or not do, think or not think, believe or not believe? What is true and what is authoritatively true or not? And lest we think this is an issue unique to our time, what is authoritatively true and what is not goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. The serpent confronts Eve saying (Read Gen. 3:1-3) Make no mistake, the fall was not just a matter of Adam and Eve eating the fruit. At its core, the fall was about rejecting God's word as the ultimate standard for all of life.

There were a number of issues the Reformers sought to address within the Catholic Church, but the issue of authority, where does it come from and where is it vested was at the center. Rome taught a three-fold structure for authority in the life of a Christian: **Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium.** Sacred Scripture, the Bible, was only one strand of authority. **Sacred Tradition, extra biblical teachings were set as equally authoritative to Sacred Scripture** and for centuries, the Roman Catholic Church had made its traditions superior in authority to the Bible. Some examples of tradition winning out over Scripture are prayers to the saints or to Mary, the Immaculate Conception, infant baptism, indulgences, and papal authority. Overshadowing the Bible and Tradition was the Magisterium. According to Roman Catholic teaching even today, **the Magisterium is the sole teaching office of the Church, with interpretation, the meaning, scope, and practice of faith and life, is entrusted to the bishops of the Catholic Church in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.** And in Catholic teaching this duty of interpretation is alone given to this body.

In contrast, Martin Luther and the other reformers stood their ground crying out against this three-fold authority, saying that the Bible alone, Scripture alone, was the sole and final authority for faith and life. The reformers believed that tradition was important, but it needed to be subordinate to the Scripture. Likewise, the teaching office of the church and the leaders of the church were also important, but always needed to be subordinate and in submission to the word of God. Four years after Luther posted his 95 Theses to the door at Wittenburg, he was summoned to defend his teachings at a council of political and religious leaders known as the Diet of Worms. What Luther thought was going to be a discussion and debate of his teachings was actually his trial as a heretic of the Catholic Church. At the assembly, Luther was given a single question to answer, will you affirm or will you recant what he had been teaching. Luther asked for 24 hours to pray, and retuning to the Diet on April 21, 1521, was again asked, *"You Martin Luther will not draw into*

doubt those things which the Catholic Church has judged already. Things that have passed into usage, right, and observance. The faith that Christ the most perfect lawgiver ordained. The faith that the martyrs strengthened with their blood. You wait in vain for a disputation you are obligated to believe. Now give your answer, yes or no. Will you recant or will you not?" Luther said, *"Since your majesties and lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason, and not by popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves; my conscious is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."* And with those words, Luther sealed his fate as a heretic of the Catholic Church and a man marked for death. The next day, Luther would be traveling back to Wittneburg, when his supporters would kidnap him and take him into hiding in the Wartburg Castle where Luther would follow through on his convictions and produce a Bible translated from Greek and Hebrew in the German language.

What made Luther and the other reformers view of *Sola Scriptura* so offensive to the Catholic Church was that the Reformers had the audacity to say that only Scripture is the inerrant authority. While popes and councils err, Scripture alone does not! For Rome, Scripture and Tradition were inerrant authorities. For Luther and the Reformers, *Sola Scriptura* is our inerrant authority.

This then is how we define *Sola Scriptura*. ***Sola Scriptura means that only scripture, because it is God's inspired word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for faith and life.*** Let's unpack this by working backwards through the definition. The Scripture is our final authority meaning it is our **chief, supreme, and ultimate authority**. (Read Colossians 2:8) Jesus is the Word, John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the Word was God"*. We need to know Christ the Word, but we know Christ from the Word. And God's word is our final authority in all things. And notice I'm not saying that God's word is our only authority. We can and should learn from other sources, but all of those sources whether they be statements of faith, creeds, councils, confessions, your favorite author – all of that we can learn from, but all of that is to be subject to the scripture as our final authority.

The Bible is the sufficient authority for faith and life. **All the truth needed for salvation and following Christ is contained in the Bible**, we won't find anything more that we need to know for salvation and following Christ outside of the Bible. The Bible is enough for us for all matters of faith and life for the Christian. (Read 2 Peter 1:3)

The Bible is the inerrant authority meaning **the God of truth gives a word of truth, and that word is flawless**. In a moment we'll look at the Bible as God's inspired word, that what Scripture says God says, but we need to understand that if we are going to hold to inspiration, inerrancy, the Word of truth God has given us is a flawless inerrant word is a necessary corollary, or flows logically together with inspiration. If the God of the Bible is the God of truth, it would make no sense if we also said the Word He has given is in error. (Read Psalm 19:7-9)

All of this comes together because **Scripture alone is God's inspired word – God is the divine author using human beings to deliver His divine message**. The very basis of biblical authority, the very reason Scripture is authoritative, is because God is the author. What sets the Bible apart from others is that God has spoken. Hebrews captures this truth powerfully saying, *"Long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son"*. God has spoken, speaks mostly clearly in Jesus Christ, and speaks even still through the Bible. And lest we think the Bible is the fanciful thoughts of men, 2 Peter 1:20 reminds us that, *"... knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* Scripture is the final and sufficient authority because Scripture and Scripture alone is the Word of God.

What distinguished Luther and the rest of the Reformers from church leaders in Rome was their claim that as important as tradition is (and they thought it was extremely important), tradition is not without error. That honor goes to Scripture alone. In fact, it is because Scripture alone is inspired by God and consequently inerrant that the Reformers believed Scripture alone is the church's final authority, sufficient for faith and practice.

Why is God's Word sufficient for the faith and life of a Christian? Turn in your Bible's to 2 Timothy 3 (Read 3:10-17) I want to focus on verse 15, 16, and 17 for a few minutes seeing why *Sola Scriptura*, the scripture alone is useful and sufficient for the faith and life of a Christian. Verse 15 tells us the first way that God's word is useful and sufficient – **God's word makes us wise for salvation**. As I said a moment ago, the Bible contains everything we need to know in order to be made right with God in salvation. In the Bible we learn that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the Lord Jesus Christ alone – that we can in no way be good enough to earn our salvation, that we do not merit favor from God from who we are or anything we have or have not done – Salvation is a gift, but it is a gift that has come at the cost of death of Jesus Christ. And we learn from the Bible that salvation has always been by faith alone in Christ alone. Even in the Old Testament, Genesis 15:6, when God makes a promise to Abraham about a coming Messiah, we're told, *"[Abraham] believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness."* While the Old Testament saints did not know the Messiah would be Jesus they were saved by God's gift of grace through faith in the coming Messiah, we are saved by God's gift of grace through faith in the Messiah who has come, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 16, we're told **God's word is God-breathed; brought into existence by God**. The Bible did not exist somewhere and God has simply conferred authority on, like saying yeah that sounds pretty good let's use that – no God breathed out His word. The Bible is God's very word, God taking the initiative to inform human beings about who He is, what He desires, and how they can come to know Him.

And because God's word is God-breathed coming from God Himself, **God's word is useful**. Paul tells Timothy four ways God's word is useful. It's useful for **teaching – God's word is a positive source of doctrine**. God's Word, both the Old and the New Testaments are useful in this way.