

Some Christians may cite 1 **Corinthians** 4:6 as more proof for the Scripture-Alone belief:

I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. [1 Cor. 4:6, RSV].

This verse does not condemn Sacred Tradition but warns against reading-between-the-lines in Scripture. The Corinthians had a problem of reading more into the Scripture text than what was actually there. The main question with this verse is which Sacred Writings are being referred to here? Martin Luther and John Calvin thought it may refer only to earlier cited Old Testament passages (1 Cor. 1:19, 31; 2:9 & 3:19-20) and not the entire Old Testament. Calvin thought that Paul may also be referring to the Epistle itself. The present tense of the clause, "beyond what is written" excludes parts of the New Testament, since the New Testament was not completely written then. This causes a serious problem for the Scripture - Alone belief and Christians.

Bible verses can be found that show the importance of Sacred Scripture but not its sufficiency or contents. There are Bible verses that also promote Sacred Tradition. In Mark 7:5-13 (Matt. 15:1-9), Jesus does not condemn all traditions but only those corrupted by the Pharisees. Although 2 Thessalonians 2:15 does not directly call Sacred Tradition the word of God, it does show some form of teachings "by word of mouth" beside Scripture and puts them on the same par as Paul's Letters. Elsewhere the preaching of the Apostles is called the "word

of God" (Acts 4:31; 17:13; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:7). The Scripture - Alone theory must assume that the Apostles eventually wrote all of these oral teachings in the New Testament. At least for St. John, this does not seem to be the case (John 21:25; 2 John 12 & 3 John 13-14). Also no Apostle listed in the New Testament states which Books belong in Scripture. Now these oral teachings were eventually written down elsewhere to preserve their accuracy, e.g., St. Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, written 96 AD (Phil. 4:3) or St. Ignatius' seven letters written 107 AD. Clement's letter is found in the *Codex Alexandrinus* (an ancient Bible manuscript) and was even considered by some early Christians to be part of Scripture.

Both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are the word of God, while the Church is "the pillar and bulwark of the truth." [1 Tim. 3:15] The Holy Spirit through the Church protects both from corruption. Some Christians may claim that doctrines on Mary are not found in the Bible, but the Scripture - Alone teaching is not found in the Bible. Promoters of Scripture-Alone have a consistency problem, since this is one teaching not found in Scripture.

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Where Is That Taught in the Bible?

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So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.
2 Thessalonians 2:15

According to most Evangelicals, a Christian needs only to believe those teachings found in Scripture (a.k.a. the Bible). For these Christians, there is no need for Apostolic Tradition or an authoritative teaching Church. For them the Bible is sufficient for learning about the faith and living a Christian life. In order to be consistent, they claim that this "By Scripture Alone" (*Sola Scriptura*) teaching is found in Scripture, especially St. Paul's Letters.

The passage most frequently used to support the Scripture - Alone belief is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. St. Paul writes:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect (complete, adequate, competent), equipped for every good work. [2 Tim. 3:16-17, RSV]

According to those that hold this belief, Scripture is sufficient since it is "profitable for teaching" and makes a Christian "perfect, equipped for every good work." On closer examination though, it becomes apparent that these verses still do not prove this teaching. Verse 16 states a fundamental Christian

doctrine. Scripture is "*inspired by God*" and "*profitable for teaching*" the faith. The Catholic Church teaches this doctrine (CCC 101-108). But this verse does not demonstrate the sufficiency of Scripture in teaching the faith. As an example, vitamins are profitable, even necessary, for good health but not sufficient. If someone ate only vitamins, he would starve to death. Likewise, Sacred Scripture is very important in learning about the Christian faith, but it does not exclude Sacred Tradition or a teaching Church as other sources concerning the faith.

St. Paul in verse 17 states that Scripture can make a Christian "*perfect, equipped for every good work.*" In this verse he is once again stressing the importance of Sacred Scripture. In similar fashion, the proverb, "practice makes perfect," stresses the importance of practice but does not imply that practice alone is sufficient in mastering a skill. Practice is very important, but it presumes a basic know-how. In sports, practice presupposes basic knowledge of the game rules, aptitude and good health.

Elsewhere in Scripture, "*steadfastness*" is said to make a Christian "*perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" [James 1:4] Even though the language (both English and Greek) in this verse is stronger, no one claims that steadfastness alone is enough for Christian growth. Faith, prayer and God's grace are also needed. Likewise in verse 17, St. Paul presumes God's grace, Timothy's faith and Sacred Tradition (2 Tim. 3:14-15). Verses 16-17 must be read in context. Only two verses earlier, St. Paul also writes:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it... [2 Tim. 3:14]

Here St. Paul suggests Tradition. Notice that Paul did not write, "knowing from which Scripture passage you learned it" but instead he writes, "*knowing from whom you learned it.*" He is implying with the "*whom*" himself and the other Apostles. Earlier in the same letter, St. Paul actually defines and commands Apostolic Tradition - "*what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*" [2 Tim. 2:2] Also if St. Paul were truly teaching the sufficiency of Scripture, verse 15 would have been a golden opportunity to list the Books of Scripture, or at least give the "official" Table of Content for the Old Testament. Instead Paul relies on Timothy's childhood tradition:

...and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the Sacred Writings (a.k.a. Scripture) which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [2 Tim. 3:15, RSV]

Even though profitable in instructing for salvation (but not sufficient), St. Paul still does not list which Books. He also does not suggest personal taste or opinion as Timothy's guide. Instead Paul relies on Timothy's childhood tradition to define the contents of Scripture. Verses 14-15 show that verses 16-17 presuppose Tradition.

Verse 15 brings up the problem of canonicity, i.e., which Books belong in Scripture? Through the centuries the Books of Scripture

were written independently along with other religious books. There were smaller collections of Books, e.g., The Books of Moses (Torah) that were used in Synagogues. The largest collection was the Greek Septuagint which the New Testament writers most often cited. St. Paul in verse 15 probably referred to the Septuagint as Scripture. Only after the Councils of Carthage and Hippo in the 4th century AD, were all of the Books of Scripture (both Old and New Testaments) compiled together under one cover to form "the Bible."

Already in Jesus' time, the question of which Books are Scripture was hotly debated. As an example, Esther and the Song of Solomon were not accepted by all as Scripture during Jesus' day. The source of the problem is that nowhere in the Sacred Writings are the Books completely and clearly listed. Sacred Scripture does not define its contents. St. Paul could have eliminated the problem of canonicity by listing the Books of Scripture (at least the Old Testament) in his Letters, but did not. Instead the Church had to discern with the aid of Sacred Tradition (CCC 120). Canonicity is a major problem for the Scripture - Alone teaching.

As a final point, verse 15 suggests only the Old Testament as Scripture since the New Testament was written after Timothy's childhood. Taken in context, verses 16-17 apply only to the Old Testament. "*All Scripture*" simply means all of the Old Testament. If verses 16-17 were to prove that Scripture is enough for Christians, then verse 15 would prove that the Old Testament is enough!