

## FIVE REFORMATION SOLAS

John Calvert

### study 1 – *Sola Scriptura*

The Scottish Presbyterian theologian, William Cunningham (1805-1861) commenced his volume: *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*; 'The Reformation from Popery in the sixteenth century was the greatest event, or series of events, that has occurred since the close of the canon of Scripture'. The call for Reformation beginnings were sounded in the late medieval period by Englishman **John Wycliffe** (1320-1384) and Czech **Jan Hus** (1369-1415), calling people back to Scripture. **Martin Luther**: Born November 10, 1483, son of a middle-class silver-miner. Destined to study Law, he turned to the monastery, where through severe struggles came to a new understanding of God, faith and the Church. This meant conflict with the papacy, his excommunication and founding of Lutheran church; Luther died in 1546. He did not want his name used for a church; people, "should not make use of my name and should not call themselves Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone ... How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name?" He wrote those words in 1522 to try and deflate a "personality cult" and to focus instead on his thought; 'The teaching is not mine'. In a sermon that same year he explained his own role in the Reformation: 'I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and my Amsdorf (friends?), the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all'.

There is no doubt that Christ was the message of the Scriptures, according to Luther. 'Christians receive Christ, the Son of God, as the central content of Holy Scripture'. Five Latin phrases from Reformation era summarised Reformers' theology. *Sola Scriptura, Sola Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Deo Gloria*. **SOLA = ALONE**. Sixteenth century German monk, theology lecturer; **Martin Luther**: confronted with: **the righteousness of God**; regarded God as Judge condemning him for his sin. English: *justice and righteousness*, translate same Greek word. Luther anguished under God's condemnation for sin; kept going to confession; no peace, forgiveness or hope. How can we gain God's forgiveness, peace, approval, love and escape His judgment? **How can I be right with God?** **Romans 1: 17**; *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith* (Habakkuk 2: 4). God declares us righteousness in Christ; like a judge acquitting the accused. **He is our perfect righteousness**; imputed, counted through Cross & Resurrection. **Justification by faith ALONE: also Romans 3 and 4.**

**John Calvin:** (1509–1564) the Reformation theologian, raised in an upper-middle-class family in Lyon, northern France. Trained in the classics and law but not in scholastic theology like Luther. His work was done in a Swiss city-state; systematic theologian: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; and commentator on most Biblical books. Like Luther, he stressed the vital thrust of the Bible's saving function. 'This is what we should in short seek in the whole Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ, and the infinite riches that are comprised in Him and are offered to us by Him from God the Father'. US theologian, **John Hannah:** "The reformation was a call for authentic Christianity, an attempt to escape the medieval corruption of the faith through renewal and reform. Its teaching, which swirled around a fivefold repetition of the word sola, was a radical message for that day (and should be for ours) because it called for a commitment to an entirely God-centred view of faith and life".

**Sola Scriptura;** the Bible alone is our highest and only authority for faith and practice. Not the church, nor tradition, or experience, or academia. We are thankful for science, sport, art, history, medicine, technology but not as worship. By our sin and evil, we distort natural revelation into syncretism, false worship & idolatry. Bible is Basis for **ALL** theology. So, **all** doctrines are formed by Scripture and must align with Scripture and be subject to Scripture. Scripture is to interpret Scripture; therefore, Sacred Scripture is its own interpreter; not popes, councils, or opinions. True that Jesus Christ is the Word of God; but we declare that the Bible does not contain the Word of God, it is the Word of God. 'Bible'; from Greek word for 'book'. 'Scriptures' = 'writings'.

**1: The Scriptures are a historical record of revelation.** Luther's position on the Scriptures is: The Bible is inerrant. 'The Word of God is perfect: it is precious and true: it is truth itself. There is no falsehood in it'. Starting from creation and the fall, the Scriptures trace the story of the acts of God from His first promise; **Genesis 3: 15**. Here is the written record of the drama of redemption: Call of Abraham, Patriarchs, Exodus, the Law, conquest of Canaan, judges, monarchy, prophets, Temple, Psalms, Wisdom; Messiah, Cross, Resurrection, Acts, letters to churches, Apocalypse. The Apostles were sure that the Old Testament was written for believers: **Romans 4:23-25; 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11 & 12; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:10-6.**

**2: The Scriptures are a revelation in the form of a historical record.** They are *the oracles of God*, **Romans 3: 2**. Then; **2 Timothy 3: 16**; ie. breathed out from God, **expired** rather than **inspired**.

Emphasises the writings not the writers. The work of God's breath, His Spirit; **2 Peter 1: 19 – 21**. Men wrote the Scriptures and God wrote the Scriptures through those men. The words of God bearing witness to Himself. Christian belief in the normative authority of Scripture rested from the start on confidence that all Scripture is God's true teaching through the human writers. God does not lie nor deceive: **Numbers 23:19 & Titus 1:1-2**. Scripture is fundamentally; God's witness to Himself. [JIP]

J I Packer; *God's Words*; asks: 'Do you want to know God? Then – stop, look and listen. **Stop** trying to discover God by pursuing thoughts, fancies and feelings of your own, in disregard of God's revelation. **Look** at what God has revealed ... Jesus Christ the Lord, who died and is alive for evermore, is the centre of Scripture. Whatever else in the Bible catches your eye, do not let it distract you from Him. **Listen** to what the Bible tells you about Him, and about our need of Him (which means, your need of Him). The Bible in which you see Him is itself God's communication to you about Him. Learn from God about the Son of God; respond to all that you are shown.' **Also**; 'Christ is not truly Lord in a man's heart till Scripture has been made lord of his mind & conscience'.

**Psalm 119:105**: *Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.* **J. C. Ryle**: *'There are many today, who believe the Bible, yet read it very little. Does your conscience tell you that you are one of these persons?'*

Luther translated the Bible into German so that any literate person could read it for themselves. He brought the matter of private interpretation of the Bible into focus. Within his response to the Catholic authorities at the Diet of Worms was the principle of private interpretation. When asked to recant of his writings Luther replied; 'Unless I am convinced by Sacred Scripture or by evident reason, I cannot recant. For my conscience is held captive by the Word of God and to stand against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me'.

The Old Testament reveals that Israel was often threatened by false prophets with their false words. The seductive attraction of the lying

teacher, with just enough legitimate word to capture, continues today. Not all false prophets are malicious; some speak from ignorance. We cannot discover God or the gospel on our own. The Spirit of God reveals the truth of God from the Word of God.

**Jeremiah 23:25-32.** Note: **James 3:1**; *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.*

**3: The Scriptures are our guide to life.** Our fears & uncertainties! Biblical inerrancy; if the Bible is not wholly true, you should be terrified. Why? If your Bible is not wholly true you have no reason to trust God. Therefore, NO assurance to believe that the One in charge of your life is good. --- We cannot pass judgment on Scripture; rather, Scripture passes judgment on us. **John Calvin:** *'Let this then stand as a fixed point, that those whom the Spirit has inwardly taught rest firmly upon Scripture, and that Scripture is self-authenticated, and that it is not right for it to be made to depend upon demonstration of reasoning, for it is by the Spirit's witness that it gains in our minds the certainty that it merits.'*

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**