

THE HEART
OF THE
REFORMATION



A
90
DAY DEVOTIONAL
ON THE
FIVE SOLAS

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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THE HEART OF THE REFORMATION: A 90-DAY DEVOTIONAL ON THE FIVE SOLAS
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PREFACE

With profound clarity and power, God Almighty spoke through the prophet Isaiah, declaring, “I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior” (Isa. 43:11). This was a message that the people of God needed to hear in Isaiah’s day. Facing the realities of national decline and the threat of foreign invasion, the men and women of ancient Israel and Judah were prone not to look solely to the Lord God for their salvation.

Sometimes this meant putting their hopes in the gods of the empires that ruled over the ancient Near East. At other times, this entailed their relying on their own wisdom and efforts to find rescue by negotiating alliances with other powers or paying them off for protection. In so doing, these ancient members of the covenant community would not have said that they were rejecting the Lord. Idolatry in that day did not result in abandoning the worship of the true God altogether but in worshiping other deities alongside the Lord of Israel. Moreover, in looking for assistance from other earthly powers, the men and women of Israel and Judah did not believe they were no longer trusting in the Lord. From God’s perspective, however, to not trust in Him alone was really not to trust Him at all.

Many of us might think that we no longer face the same temptation. Church history tells us otherwise. Even in the days of the Apostles, professing believers were beginning to forget that besides the Lord, there is no Savior. As we see in Paul's epistle to the Galatians, for example, some believed that trusting in Christ alone was not enough for salvation. Instead, faith had to be combined with works in order to make one worthy of salvation. Since that day, there have been people in the visible church who have looked not to Christ alone for salvation but Christ plus something else.

The dispute between those who believe that salvation is by faith in Christ alone and those who believe salvation comes through faith in Christ plus something else reached a high point in the Protestant Reformation. In seeking to address errors in the medieval Western church, the Protestant Reformers stressed that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone and four associated biblical doctrines that are necessary to preserving that core truth of the gospel. Over time these truths came to be known as the five *solas* of the Reformation:

- *sola Scriptura*: Scripture is the only infallible authority for faith and practice.
- *solus Christus*: Christ in His person and work is the only Savior.
- *sola gratia*: Only the sovereign grace of God accomplishes salvation.
- *sola fide*: Faith is the only instrument by which we are united to Christ and receive all His benefits.
- *solī Deo gloria*: The purpose of salvation is to give all glory to God alone.

STUDYING THE SOLAS

The five *solas* of the Reformation are core biblical truths that reinforce the central teaching of the gospel and all of Scripture that only the Lord God Almighty saves us from sin, death, and Satan. Moreover, the five *solas* help us to understand how and why the Lord is the only Savior. Thus, it is vital for all Christians to understand the five *solas* of the Reformation. In grasping them, we will

know God better, love Him more, appreciate all that was necessary for our salvation more deeply, and be motivated to live in a manner that redounds to God's glory. They give us a framework for seeing how the various parts of God's plan of redemption fit together and for seeing the coherent, unified message of the Bible in all its beautiful diversity.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This devotional has been designed to help believers understand the five *solas* of the Reformation and live in light of these precious truths. Over the course of ninety days, you will explore each of the five *solas* and see how they are grounded in the Word of God while also seeing how various other biblical truths are encapsulated in each *sola*.

The devotional is divided into five sections, each devoted to one of the *solas*. A short introduction that defines the *sola* to be studied begins each section of eighteen devotionals. We recommend that you read that introduction before beginning the devotionals of that particular section.

Each devotional gives the passage of the Scripture to be studied that day and highlights one or more of the most important verses from the passage for the subject of the study. Following the listed passage, you will find the body of the study, which will provide important background for the passage, an explanation of the text, and a discussion of how the passage relates to other texts of Scripture and theological concepts. The *coram Deo* section of each devotional provides practical application, and a list of other passages that have bearing on the study is also given. It is recommended that you read the passage for the day's study in its entirety before moving through the other sections of the devotional.

May these devotionals assist you in coming to a fuller knowledge of our great God and Savior. To Him alone be the glory forever.

SOLA
SCRIPTURA

I

SCRIPTURE ALONE

DAY 1

NATURAL REVELATION

PSALM 19 “THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD, AND THE SKY ABOVE PROCLAIMS HIS HANDIWORK” (V. 1).

Reformation-era debates regarding divine revelation focused on the authority of Scripture and its relation to the authority of the church and the authority of church tradition. Though the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church would finally disagree with respect to the final authority and sufficiency of Scripture, there is one aspect of divine revelation on which they did find a large measure of agreement. Both Roman Catholic theology and Reformation theology confess that God reveals Himself in His creation.

In theological categories, we speak of God’s revelation of Himself in the created order as natural revelation. This is in contrast with special revelation, wherein God speaks directly to His people via a prophet or an Apostle. God’s revelation of Himself in natural revelation is less direct and is addressed not to a specific person or community but rather to humanity in general. For that reason, natural revelation is also known as general revelation.

We say that natural revelation is less direct than special revelation because in natural revelation, the Lord does not disclose specific truths about salvation, specific plans for individuals, or anything of that nature. Instead, He reveals Himself and His attributes in a general way. Essentially, God reveals Himself through natural revelation as the Creator of all things. As we see in today’s passage, the heavens themselves proclaim that they are the handiwork of a personal Creator (v. 1).

Psalms 19 emphasizes the universality of natural revelation. There is no place on the planet where God’s natural revelation does not proclaim that He is and that He has made all things. Romans 1:20–21 fleshes out this revelation a bit more, explaining that natural revelation proclaims God’s power and that we owe Him honor, thanks, and worship. It does not tell us everything there is to know about the Lord, and we can hardly build

an extensive theology based on natural revelation. But it does tell us enough—that we are creatures and that there is a Creator to whom our worship is owed.

At the end of the day, no one can be a true atheist because natural revelation is so clear. John Calvin writes, “[God’s] essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse” (*Institutes* 1.5.1).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm 14;
Acts 14:15-
17; 17:22-
29; Romans
2:14-16

APPLICATION

Natural revelation is limited in its scope, but that does not mean it fails to achieve its purposes. God reveals Himself in nature so that no one will be able to plead ignorance of His existence on the last day. His message gets through, and we can appeal to creation as proof of His existence when we are talking with unbelievers. Let us not be afraid to use God’s natural revelation to point others to Him.

DAY 2

THE LIMITS OF NATURAL REVELATION

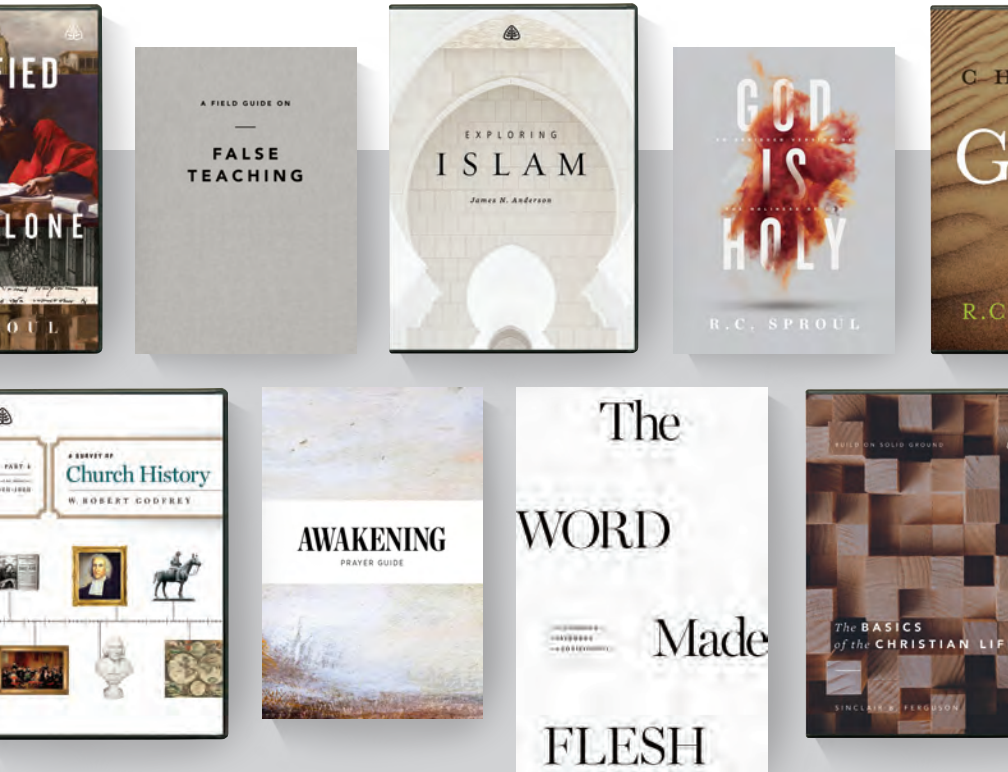
ROMANS 1:18-32 “ALTHOUGH THEY KNEW GOD, THEY DID NOT HONOR HIM AS GOD OR GIVE THANKS TO HIM, BUT THEY BECAME FUTILE IN THEIR THINKING, AND THEIR FOOLISH HEARTS WERE DARKENED” (V. 21).

God has revealed Himself so clearly in the natural order that no person will ever be able to stand before the Creator and claim that there is insufficient evidence that He exists and should be worshiped. We have already seen how the Bible teaches this in texts such as Psalm 19, and today’s passage makes the point with even greater forcefulness. As Paul says in Romans 1:20, God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”

I

DAY 1 & 2

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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ALL OF GOD'S GRACE AND ALL FOR HIS GLORY

Sometimes one word is all that stands between the truth and a lie, between life and death. In the Reformation, that word was *sola*—"alone." At a time when leaders in the church claimed to speak for God, the Protestant Reformers reminded God's people that Scripture alone is our infallible authority. While many people sought to work their way to heaven, the Reformers boldly proclaimed the only true gospel: salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

That word, "alone," made all the difference then, and it makes all the difference today. Take up this devotional to spend ninety days with the five *solas* of the Reformation. These core biblical truths display the reliability of God's Word and the depths of His mercy, helping you grow in faith day by day.



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