



These truths alone

THE FIVE SOLAS OF THE REFORMATION

by Jason Helopoulos

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The Good Book Guide to the Five Solas of the Reformation

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Series Consultants: Tim Chester, Tim Thornborough,
Anne Woodcock, Carl Laferton

The Good Book Company

Tel: (US): 866 244 2165

Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880

Email (US): info@thegoodbook.com

Email (UK): info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites

North America: www.thegoodbook.com

UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au

New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



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Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home or in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, moms and tots, students, businessmen or teens. That's why we've designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to appropriately apply what we have discovered to our lives. Let's take a look at what is included:

- ↔ **Talkabout:** Most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here's the question that will do that. It's designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** The Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. The **Leader's Guide** contains **guidance for questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional “follow-up” questions.
- ⋮ **Explore more (optional):** These questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to fit it all together like a jig-saw; or occasionally look at a part of the passage that's not dealt with in detail in the main study.
- **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you'll keep coming across **apply** sections. These are questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. 🗣️ **Getting personal** is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have learned.
- ↑ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God's word—in line with his concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader's Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God's word.

Why study the Five Solas?

“Guard the good deposit entrusted to you,” Paul said to Timothy (2 Timothy 1 v 14). Some things are of such worth that we must keep them, whatever the cost. The Reformers of the 16th century rightly valued the gospel as such a gift, and many willingly gave their lives for the cause of preserving this truth and passing it along to others.

As the Reformers looked at the European church, they saw an institution that had wandered from the heart of the gospel. And when the heart of the gospel is lost, the Christian faith is lost. Therefore, these men and women were moved to put their livelihoods, homes, fortunes, and lives on the line to restore to the church the essential teachings of the gospel. These have come down to us by five Latin phrases: *Sola Scriptura*, *Solus Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*. Translated into English, they assert that salvation is according to Scripture alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone.

Each of these *Solas* proves to be essential to the gospel. We neglect them to our harm. When the church loses its understanding of these rallying cries of the Reformation, it loses the gospel. Therefore, it is imperative that we guard the good deposit that has been entrusted to us. We want our world, country, town, neighbors, homes, and our very selves to be affected and gripped by the good news of the gospel. But if we do not know and adhere to these essentials, then we have no good news to pass on. This Good Book Guide gives us the opportunity to study them together, with the prayerful aim that we might cherish this wonderful salvation and preserve its truths for the next generation.

Oh, the glories of the gospel! We have been given a good deposit. It has been entrusted to us. Let us know and delight in it.

1

Deuteronomy 31 – 32; 2 Timothy 3 v 14-17

SOLA SCRIPTURA: BY SCRIPTURE ALONE

“Your word of life has been, and still remains among us, faithfully collected in the sacred registers of the holy Scripture ... the image of your glory, the law of your kingdom, the ladder of heaven, the gate of paradise, the trumpet of salvation ... the treasury of piety, virtue, wisdom, consolation, and perfection.”

Theodore Beza (1519-1605)



talkabout

1. What are some of the different authorities in your life?

- What are some of the benefits of living under these authorities? What are some of the implications?

DICTIONARY

Levi (31 v 9): one of the tribes of Israel; all priests were Levites.

The ark of the covenant (v 9): a golden chest kept at the center of the tabernacle, marking the place of God's presence.

The year of release (v 10): God commanded that every seven years debtors and slaves should be released.

The Feast of Booths (v 10): a yearly harvest celebration; later, it would recall Israel's nomadic life, guided by God, after he led them out of Egypt.

Sojourner (v 12): traveler; guest.



investigate

- ▶ Read Deuteronomy 31 v 9-13 and 32 v 45-47**

2. What is the context of these verses (31 v 1-8)?

- What significance does this give to Moses' words here?

- 3.** Moses instructs the priests and elders of Israel to read the Scriptures in the hearing of the people every seven years (31 v 9-11). Why?

- What does this tell us about the nature of the Scriptures and how the people of God should view them?

- What does this tell us about the role of spiritual leaders?

- 4.** In 32 v 45-47, what does Moses emphasize about the Scriptures?



→ apply

5. Moses highlights that we pass on the faith through the reading and teaching of the Scriptures. What are some of the practical implications of this emphasis for us, for example, in our homes, churches, children's ministries and outreach?



explore more

optional

Sola Scriptura v Solo Scriptura

Does Moses' emphasis on the priority of reading and teaching Scripture mean that traditions, creeds and confessions are of no use for the Christian? If they are beneficial, what help do they provide, do you think?

It is important to note that the Reformers held to *Sola Scriptura* and not *Solo Scriptura*. *Solo Scriptura* advocates a radical individualism, rejecting that the church, creeds, confessions and tradition have any authority, while embracing private judgement above all else. This finds no credence in the teaching of the Reformers or the early church.

On the other hand, *Sola Scriptura* acknowledges the authority of the church, creeds, confessions and tradition, but always as subordinate to, and only as they agree with, the Scriptures themselves. The theologian R.C. Sproul is helpful in explaining the place of biblical church tradition within the *Sola Scriptura* position:

"Although tradition does not rule our interpretation, it does guide it. If upon reading a particular passage you have come up with an interpretation that has escaped the notice of every other Christian for 2,000 years, or has been championed by universally recognized heretics, chances are pretty good that you had better abandon your interpretation." (*The Agony of Deceit*, pages 34-35)

What traditions does your local church practice? What are some traditions you practice as a Christian? Are they biblical? How have they been helpful?

➤ **Read Mark 7 v 1-13**

What concerns Jesus in this passage and elicits such a sound rebuke from him?

What was the error that the Pharisees and scribes were committing?



getting personal

Do you believe the word of God is sufficient for your salvation and life of faith? When do doubts begin to creep in? How do you fight such doubts?



investigate

➤ **Read 2 Timothy 3 v 14-17**

6. What is the significance of Paul exhorting Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (v 14)?

DICTIONARY

Sacred writings (v 15): the Old Testament Scriptures.

Profitable (v 16): useful.

Reproof (v 16): showing error or blame.

- What had Timothy learned (v 15)?

7. What do the Scriptures teach (v 15)?

- Do the Scriptures automatically confer salvation? If not, what do they actually do?

8. How do we know the Scriptures are true in what they teach (v 16)? (See also 2 Peter 1 v 21.)



explore more

optional

If the Scriptures are without error, then how do we explain errant teachings of the Scriptures or different interpretations of certain passages in the history of the church?

What do the following passages indicate?

- 2 Corinthians 2 v 17; 4 v 2
- 2 Timothy 4 v 3-4
- Hebrews 5 v 11-13
- Romans 14 v 1-4, 17
- 1 Corinthians 13 v 9, 12

9. How does Paul outline the sufficiency of the Scriptures in verses 16-17?



apply

10. In what ways does *Sola Scriptura* grant freedom to the Christian? Think about the Christian's confidence, authority and peace.



11. From these two passages, what would you say to a person who says they have found a certain tradition helpful in their Christian life and they would like you to try it?

These passages show the great gift which the Scriptures are from God to his people. But it may be there are moments when we can't say we desire them more "than gold, even much fine gold"; or that they are "sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19 v 10).

12. In those times, how can we encourage our love for the Scriptures?



getting personal

Do you value the Scriptures as a gift from God? Consider your past week. If you added up all the minutes, how much time did you spend in the Scriptures?

How could your Bible reading be improved (quantity and quality)?



pray

Thank God for:

- the gift of the Scriptures.
- the clarity and sufficiency of the Scriptures for the life of faith.
- pastors and teachers who uphold the truth of God's word.

Ask God for:

- greater personal love for the Scriptures.
- protection for your pastors and elders as they preach and teach.
- churches in your area to be filled with people who demand sound and clear preaching of God's word.