

SOLA



SCRIPTURA

The PROTESTANT POSITION on the BIBLE

Joel R. Beeke ♦ Sinclair B. Ferguson

W. Robert Godfrey ♦ Ray Lanning ♦ John MacArthur

R.C. Sproul ♦ Derek W. H. Thomas ♦ James White

Foreword by Michael Horton ♦ Edited by Don Kistler

Endorsements

“That the Bible as we have it today is the inspired Word of God, and that it is authoritative and sufficient for all faith and practice, is the foundation on which all other Christian doctrines stand. This truth must be continually affirmed and defended. *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible* does this in a way that will prove profitable to both laypeople and professional clergy. I highly recommend it.”

—DR. JERRY BRIDGES

Bible teacher, conference speaker,
Author, *The Pursuit of Holiness* and other titles

“Christians are Bible people. We are made followers of Christ by the message of the Bible and continue to be guided in the ways of Christ by what the Bible says. The Bible is the Spirit’s sword, and we must learn to wield it with confidence in order to live effectively in this world. This book will help you do that. The contributors are trustworthy teachers who understand the importance of the recovery of *sola Scriptura*, not only for the sixteenth century, but for the twenty-first. I am grateful to Reformation Trust for making it available once again.”

—DR. THOMAS K. ASCOL

Senior pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Fla.
Executive director, Founders Ministries

“The Christian doctrine of Scripture, that the Bible alone is the Word of God, that it clearly and infallibly reveals the triune God and His truth in Christ, has always been at the heart of the faith. Since the sixteenth century, there have been three great assaults on this doctrine: the Romanist claim to authority over Scripture, the modernist rejection of the authority and truthfulness of Scripture, and the late-modern denial of the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture. The republication of *Sola Scriptura* is a most welcome response to each of these. This book is more relevant and necessary today than when it first appeared.”

—DR. R. SCOTT CLARK

Professor of church history and historical theology
Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, Calif.

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	vii
— <i>Michael Horton</i>	
PREFACE	xi
— <i>Bruce Bickel</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS	xiii
1. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY <i>SOLA SCRIPTURA</i> ?	1
— <i>W. Robert Godfrey</i>	
2. <i>SOLA SCRIPTURA</i> AND THE EARLY CHURCH	17
— <i>James White</i>	
3. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SCRIPTURE	39
— <i>R. C. Sproul</i>	
4. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE	59
— <i>Derek W. H. Thomas</i>	
5. THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE WRITTEN WORD	71
— <i>John MacArthur</i>	
6. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION	91
— <i>Sinclair B. Ferguson</i>	
7. THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF SCRIPTURE	111
— <i>Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning</i>	
AFTERWORD	143
— <i>Don Kistler</i>	

FOREWORD

It was a time of prosperity and ease, with peace on the often-troubled borders, as the surrounding nations that had built threatening empires fell into internal decay and lethargy. Attracted by the idols of the nations, God's people again fell into false worship, and this "truth decay" led to incredible depths of social injustice and immorality. Although the churches were full and, according to the reports, the worship was lively, God was not pleased.

Thus, nearly eight hundred years before Christ's birth, God called Amos—a "jack of all trades" (shepherd, fig tree dresser, and livestock breeder)—to look after the spiritual flock whose self-satisfied condition had resulted in apostasy. Amos wrote: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, 'that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it'" (Amos 8:11–12).

God's Word had been the center of Israel's life, as it had been since creation: "And God said, 'Let there be light'" (Gen. 1:3a). God's utterance created the universe and preserved it through history. His Word implicitly promised blessing to Adam and his posterity for obedience and warned of a curse for breaking the solemn covenant (Gen. 2:16–17). That same Word announced judgment for transgression and then justification by the Messiah who was to come (Gen. 3:14–19). Through faith in the One promised through this Word from above, the lost could be redeemed and reconciled to God. As the direct expression of His own character and will, God's Word was incapable of being distinguished—much less divorced—from God Himself. His people never conceived of such utterances as the mere reflections of humanity in its

spiritual quest. God's Word, both in command and promise, was not only to have the last word, but the first word and every word in between, in all matters concerning doctrine and the Christian life.

However, we fallen sinners are creative folk. We do not appreciate being told from above what to believe and how to conduct ourselves in this life. The Frank Sinatra phrase "I did it my way" still expresses the sentiment of the rebellious human heart. Israel sought to worship God in its own way, in a manner that accommodated the felt needs of worshipers. Other "words" were added, leading the people away from the clear and simple teaching of Scripture, and even though this path always led to divine judgment in the form of earthly exiles, the people never seemed to learn their lessons about adding to Scripture (legalism) or subtracting from it (antinomianism). But God's Word is what it is, whether we acknowledge it or not. If we do not accept it, God's Word judges us anyway. If we do, it announces its saving promise of eternal life in Christ.

Throughout the prophetic literature, we notice a common theme: the false prophets tell the people what they want to hear, baptize it with God's name, and serve it up as God's latest word to His people. As it was in the days of the judges, the kings, and the prophets, so it is in our day: there is a famine in the land for God's Word. False prophets abound, promising peace when there is no peace, as the pastor is replaced with the manager-therapist-coach-entertainer.

Like Israel, wanting to experience God on her own terms, the medieval church preferred idolatry to true worship and relied on visual forms created by the human imagination when she should have been sustained by the written and preached Word. In our own day, we also find ourselves immersed in a visual culture where words in general are both unimportant and viewed with a growing cynicism. Reflecting the contemporary attitude in both the academy and in popular culture, one pop group of the 1980s asked, "What are words for?"

But Christianity is a religion of words, a religion of the Book. Like the Reformers, we must not accommodate a visually or experientially oriented culture in the interest of marketing success, but must pour all of our energies

FOREWORD

into forming word-centered community, however out of step with contemporary society that may be. The Reformers insisted that Scripture not only has the final say, but that it is the *formal* principle of everything we believe about doctrine or conduct. That is, it shapes and forms our faith. It does not simply sign off on essentially secular definitions of reality borrowed from psychology, business, sociology, politics, and the like. Rather, it is more likely to overthrow our presuppositions. Here, the Reformers distinguished between “things heavenly” and “things earthly.” In the latter realm, including science, art, and philosophy, unbelievers could contribute to the advance of knowledge and experience. After all, Scripture is not interested in telling us everything about everything, and God’s world is open to the investigation of everyone. But the transcendent realities of God’s character, His commands, and His saving work are not available to the philosopher, scientist, artist, or therapist. Secular wisdom may lead us to the truth about the revolution of planets, but it cannot explain the nature of God, man, sin and redemption. It cannot lead us to the truth about how we are to be saved from God’s wrath, for it refuses to believe that divine wrath is a reality. “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (Rom. 1:18a), said the apostle Paul, because it does not fit the questions—much less the answers—of secular wisdom.

But in our day, preaching cannot be foolish. It must be “relevant,” which is the word we have drafted into the service of market-driven approaches. However, the message of the cross assumes the terror of the law, divine wrath toward sinners (and not just their sins), and the need for a substitutionary sacrifice to assuage divine justice. It assumes that the greatest problem facing humanity is original and actual sin—personal rebellion against a holy God—not stress, low self-esteem, and a failure to realize one’s full potential.

These challenges—a visually oriented and consumer-driven society—have given rise to another famine of the hearing of God’s Word. His law, consisting of all the Bible’s commands and threats for violating divine holiness, has been reduced to helpful principles for personal well being, so that one may feel unsatisfied but not condemned. His gospel, consisting of all the Bible’s promises of salvation for sinners through Christ’s perfect life, death,

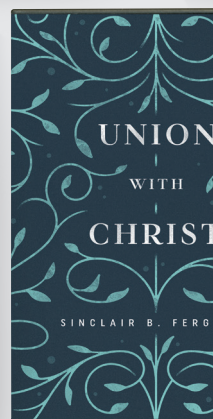
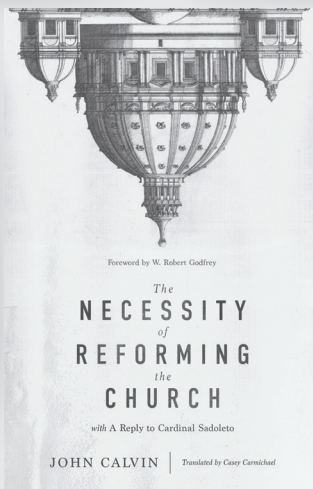
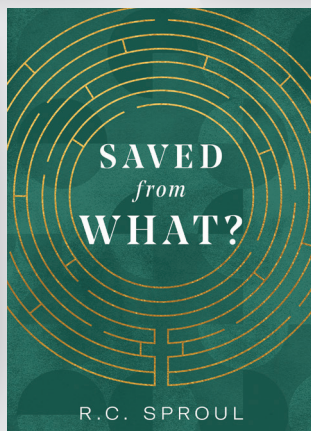
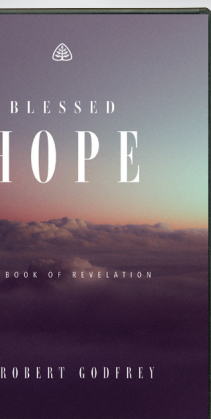
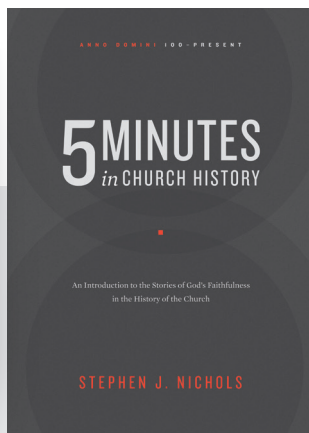
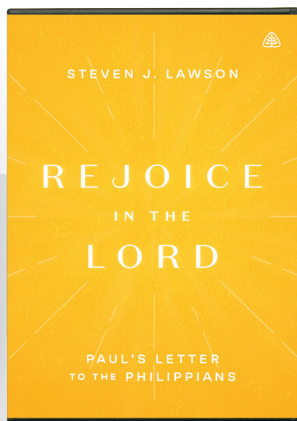
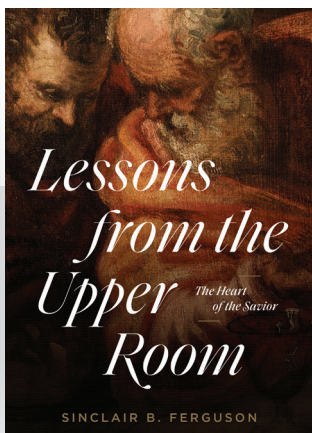
resurrection, and saving offices, has been similarly reduced to platitudes. In short, God's Word has been substituted with human words, not only in mainline churches, but within the mainstream evangelical movement. We have forgotten, it seems, that the Word creates life and that it is the source of the church's growth and maturity.

Not only must we recover an official commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture, it must be the only voice we hear from those who assume the momentous task of being God's spokesmen. God's spokesmen must ring the bells on this point. While this book has the Roman Catholic Church's view of Scripture in mind when it asserts Protestantism's position, it is *Protestantism* that this book is trying to reach as much as Rome. We contributors lament that Rome is so aggressive in its error, yes, but we equally lament that Protestantism is so passive in its capitulation. It is not just that the walls of the city are being assaulted, but that the Protestant church seems to have thrown the keys to the city out to the invaders.

But this book is not simply a lamentation; it is a way forward. It attempts to assess the present situation with a view to calling the shepherds of Israel to hear God's voice again and make it plain to a new generation. Fulfilled already in Christ, may the prophecy of Amos receive fresh relevance in our own day: "On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name," says the LORD who does this thing" (Amos 9:11–12). Let us pray to the Lord of the harvest for relief from this famine and for spiritual plenty in the years to come!

—*Michael Horton*
December 1995

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