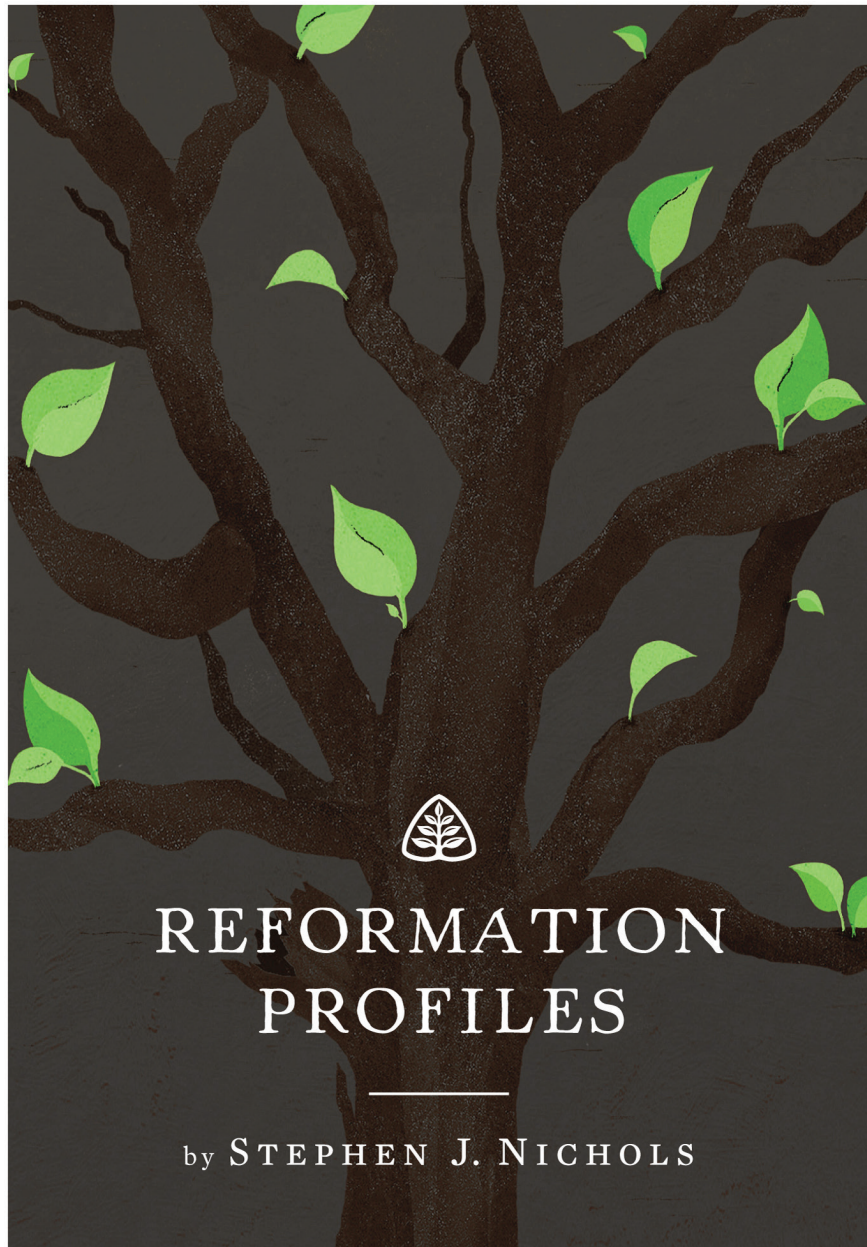


S T U D Y G U I D E



REFORMATION PROFILES

by STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

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Stephen J. Nichols



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Why the Reformation Matters

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The author of Ecclesiastes states, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). Apart from the theological significance of this profound statement, another observation arises concerning the study of history: it matters. Although time progresses in a linear direction and contains unique, monumental events (culminating in the return of Jesus), creation witnesses the repetition of patterns, movements, and interactions between humans. The church today faces problems similar to the church of yesteryear, albeit packaged and branded in different forms. A careful study of the history of the church prepares and equips its members to face the difficulties of its own day. The Reformation of the sixteenth century emphasized a return to the Word of God as a remedy for the theological deficiencies of the Roman Catholic Church, and Dr. Nichols embarks on this series to assist the current church by understanding the *solas* of the Reformation and their place for the people of God in all ages.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Genesis 22; Psalm 68:19–20; 136; John 3:16

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To illuminate the context physically and spiritually from which the Reformation emerged
2. To demonstrate the importance of studying the Reformation
3. To present an introduction to the *solas* and an outline of the progression of this teaching series

QUOTATION

In the very midst of life, snares of death surround us. Who shall help us in this strife, lest the foe confound us? Thou only, Lord, Thou only. In the midst of death's dark veil, powers of hell overtake us. Who will help when they assail? Who secure will make us? Thou only, Lord, Thou only. In the midst of utter woe, when our sins oppress us, where shall we for refuge go? Where for grace to bless us? To Thee, Lord Jesus, only. Thy precious blood was shed to win, full atonement for our sin.

—from Martin Luther's hymn, "In the Very Midst of Life"

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. From Death to Life, From Darkness to Light

- A. The harsh, plague-ridden conditions in Europe during the Middle Ages (circa AD 500 to 1500), also called the "Dark Ages," forced Europeans to face and accept mortality and death.
 - i. Death surrounded the people, and they did not possess the faculty and knowledge to challenge it, so they accepted it.
 - ii. The common saying *Media vita in morte sumus*, meaning, "In the midst of life, we die," originated and circulated in the medieval times.
- B. The darkness percolating spiritually during the Middle Ages resembled the bleak physical conditions of the times.
- C. The Reformation occurred in this era, and out of death and darkness came life and light through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - i. Martin Luther turned the phrase, "In the midst of life, we die," on its head by pointing to the gospel and stating, "In the midst of death, we live."
 - ii. To demonstrate the emergence from spiritual darkness, the city of Geneva, under the leadership of John Calvin, took up the motto *Post tenebras lux*, meaning "After darkness, light."

II. Why We Study the Reformation

- A. History matters
 - i. Christians possess a historic faith, at the center of which resides a historical Savior.
 - ii. God calls His people to look back at His redemptive work on their behalf to remind them of their relationship.
 - 1. The Bible continually commands this exercise, from the earliest of God's people to ancient Israel to new covenant believers.
 - 2. The Holy Spirit works in God's people at every stage of history, and, therefore, each stage of church history remains important for all believers at all times.
- B. The Reformation captured, or recaptured, the essence of the church's purpose.

- i. By the time of the Reformation, everyone, the church included, recognized the detestable state of the church.
 1. The period between the thirteenth and sixteenth century, referred to as the later medieval age or the High Middle Ages, witnessed significant deterioration in the Roman Catholic Church.
 2. Many attempted to reform the church.
 - a. The Conciliar Movement attempted an administrative reform in the Roman Catholic Church by calling for a shift of power to the more ancient form of in the church, a council of bishops.
 - 1) The famous Czech reformer, John Hus, belonged to this movement.
 - 2) The movement did not succeed.
 - b. Many advocated a spiritual reform in the church, called the *Devotio Moderna*, the “new devotion.”
 - 1) Thomas À Kempis, the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, belonged to this movement.
 - 2) While marginally successful, the movement did not succeed.
 3. The reform movements, while commendable, failed to diagnose the true problem: theological rottenness.
 - ii. The Reformers of the sixteenth century recognized the theological deficiency extant in the Roman Catholic Church and they prescribed the proper solution: return to the centrality of the Word of God.
 1. A theological shortcoming needed a theological solution.
 2. The Reformers infused proper theology into preaching, Christian education, missions, and more.
- C. The church faces similar challenges today, and we can learn particular things from them to assist us.
- i. This teaching series will set out to accomplish this task by examining the *solas* of the Reformation in conjunction with biographical sketches.
 - ii. We will learn the purpose and nature of the *solas*, how they connect to Scripture, and how they connect to being a disciple of Christ.
- D. The Reformers, real people with real lives, give us insight into what it means to be a Christian.

III. The Five *Solas*

A. *Sola Scriptura*: “Scripture alone”

- i. The issue concerns authority.
 1. Tradition has a valuable place in the church.
 2. However, tradition always submits to Scripture, a principle the Reformers felt the Roman Catholic Church had abandoned.
- ii. We will examine the life of Martin Luther in conjunction with *sola Scriptura*.

B. *Sola gratia*: “Grace alone”; *Sola fide*: “Faith alone”

- i. The gospel comes through grace alone and is received by faith alone.
- ii. We will examine the life of Ulrich Zwingli in conjunction with *sola gratia*.
- iii. We will examine the life of Lady Jane Grey in conjunction with *sola fide*.
- C. *Solus Christus*: “Christ alone”
 - i. Salvation comes only through Christ, the lone Mediator between God and man.
 - ii. We will examine the life of John Calvin in conjunction with *solus Christus*.
- D. *Soli Deo Gloria*: “The glory of God alone”
 - i. All of creation and redemption serve the glory of God alone.
 - ii. We will examine the lives of the Puritans in conjunction with *solī Deo gloria*.

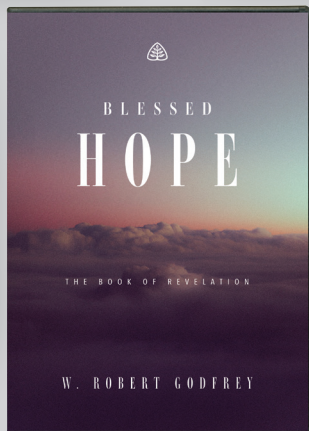
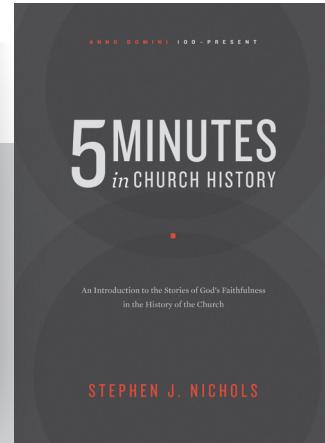
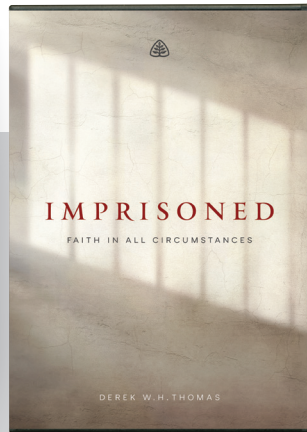
STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Middle Ages are also called the “Dark Ages” because death and spiritual darkness surrounded the people living within this period of history.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. *Post tenebras lux* means _____.
 - a. “With darkness comes light”
 - b. “Darkness and light mingled”
 - c. “After darkness, light”
 - d. “Light breaks into the darkness”
3. The Conciliar Movement succeeded in reforming the administration of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. What was the primary solution the Reformers posited to cure the theological deficiency of the Roman Catholic Church?
 - a. Replace the Pope
 - b. Move the seat of central authority from Rome
 - c. Return to the Word of God
 - d. Emphasize tradition more
5. The study of history, particularly the Reformation, matters today because the church faces similar problems in our era.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do historians refer to the Middle Ages as the “Dark Ages”? How did the Reformation challenge and confront the problems contributing to the darkness of this period of history?
2. Why does history matter, particularly for the church?
3. How did the Reformation capture the essence of the church’s purpose? What reformation movements did Dr. Nichols describe that occurred prior to the Reformation of the sixteenth century? Did these movements succeed? Why or why not? What did the Reformers view as the primary deficiency within the Roman Catholic Church, and what remedy did they present?
4. Does the church face similar problems today as the Reformers faced in the sixteenth century? If so, what are some of these problems? How does the study of history assist the church in facing these difficulties and obstacles?
5. List and define the five *solas*.

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