

S T U D Y G U I D E



Hath God Said?

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Renew your Mind.

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What Is the Standard of Truth?

INTRODUCTION

Today, not only is the authority of the Bible under attack, but authority as a concept is under attack. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul relates today's crisis over authority to the historic events of the Reformation to show the importance of an objective and absolute standard of truth.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To focus on authority as the formal cause of the Reformation
2. To demonstrate the fundamental similarities between the Reformation's controversy over authority and the problem of cultural relativism

SCRIPTURE READING

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as it really is, the word of God.

—1 Thessalonians 2:13

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. We live in an age characterized by a crisis over authority, a crisis in which Christians cannot escape questions about the trustworthiness of the Bible.
 1. For its first 1,800 years, the new covenant church enjoyed a virtually universal confidence in sacred Scripture.
 2. In the last two hundred years, the church has experienced a crisis over the authority of Scripture that has spilled over into and become a part of our cultural milieu.

- a. Western culture has experienced a loss of a sense of authority due to scholarly criticism directed toward the Bible.
 - b. Around the start of the twentieth century, Abraham Kuyper made the observation that biblical criticism had become biblical vandalism.
- B. To understand today's crisis over authority requires an examination of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, which centered on the issue of authority.
1. The material cause of the Reformation was the debate over justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).
 2. The formal cause of the Reformation was the debate over Scripture as the final authority for faith and life (*sola Scriptura*).
 - a. Luther differed with Rome's view on justification to the degree that he was willing to stand against Rome's claims of absolute authority.
 - b. Luther refused to recant his views, holding fast to the belief that the Bible is the only source of authority that can bind our consciences.
 3. The Reformation was ultimately a crisis over authority.
 - a. Rome maintained that the Bible was established by the church, which places church authority on equal footing with biblical authority.
 - b. The Reformers countered that the church received the Bible from God; therefore, the church did not establish the Bible's authority.
 4. The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Reformation by launching the Counter-Reformation, culminating in moral reform and the Council of Trent.
 - a. The Council of Trent (1545–63) was Rome's theological response to the Reformation; it opposed *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*.
 - b. In opposition to *sola Scriptura*, the Council of Trent declared that there are two sources of divine authority: Scripture and tradition.
 - c. Through this declaration, Rome asserted that the Bible is indeed the infallible Word of God, yet tradition alone infallibly interprets it.
 - d. In effect, the Council of Trent made Luther's denial of tradition tantamount to a denial of Scripture itself.
- C. The debate over authority during the Protestant Reformation is widely applicable to the crisis over authority in our own day of cultural relativism.
1. Our day is a day in which the whole concept authority is questioned, resulting in the denial of any standard by which to judge truth.
 2. Authority is defined as "the right to impose obligation," so a denial of authority strikes at the core of our doctrine of Scripture, at God's right to be God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. When did the second slogan of the Reformation, *sola Scriptura*, find its pinnacle moment in the life of Martin Luther?
 - a. Luther's nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses

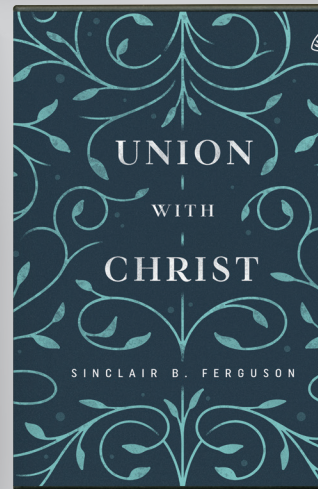
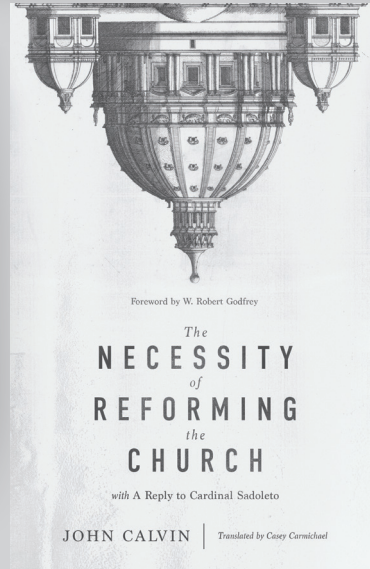
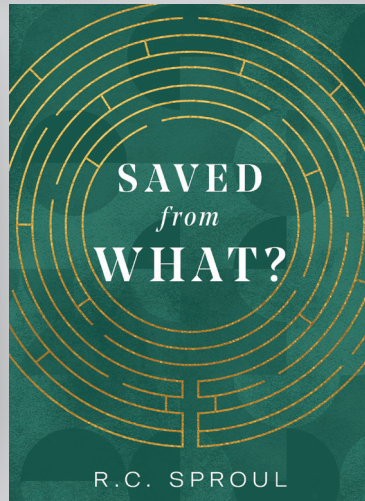
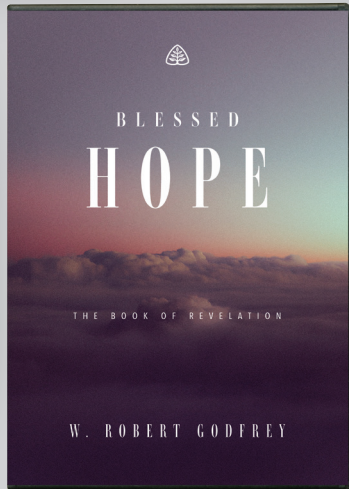
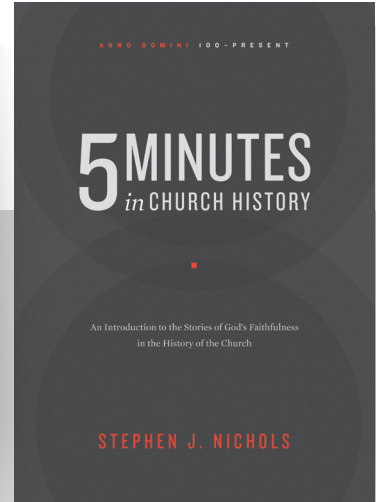
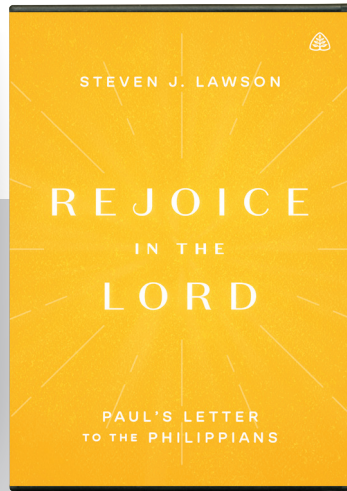
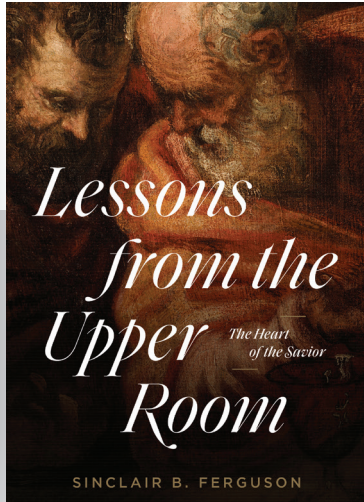
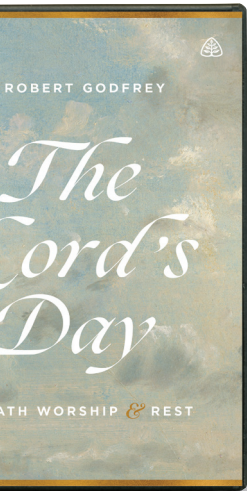
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- b. Luther's public disputation with Johann Eck
 - c. Luther's public disputation with Thomas Cajetan
 - d. Luther's defense at the Diet of Worms
2. To which animal was Martin Luther likened in the papal encyclical that announced his excommunication?
 - a. Bull
 - b. Boar
 - c. Swan
 - d. Goose
 3. Which of the following is an argument the Reformers used against the Roman Catholic Church for the absolute authority of the Bible?
 - a. The canon of Scripture was established by the church.
 - b. The canon of Scripture was not established by the church.
 - c. The church historically used language indicating that Scripture was received.
 - d. The councils of the church were all in error before the Reformation.
 4. The formal cause of the Reformation was the debate over justification.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 5. What were the conclusions of the Council of Trent regarding the Bible and church tradition?
 - a. Scripture is infallible when in agreement with church tradition.
 - b. Scripture is fallible yet church tradition corrects it infallibly.
 - c. Church tradition is the infallible interpretation of Scripture.
 - d. Church tradition is fallible and governed by Scripture.
 6. How did Dr. Sproul define authority in this lecture?
 - a. The power to enforce laws
 - b. The power to establish laws
 - c. The right to determine truth
 - d. The right to impose obligation

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your everyday experience, how do you know what is true? In what ways are your standards for truth objective or subjective? Why?
2. How were the two great concerns of the Reformation—*sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*—related to one another? How does the Reformation teach you the importance of basing your faith and life on the Bible?

3. What do you understand to be the popular concept of authority today? In what ways do you think the Reformation's crisis over authority can be related to modern views of authority in and outside the church?
4. What was fundamentally wrong with the Roman Catholic Church's idea of authority as expressed in the sixteenth century? If core Roman Catholic doctrines were to change relative to justification, would its position on authority still pose a problem for Protestants?

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