

Sermon 1

The Foundation of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*

Steven Thomas
Huron Baptist Church of Flat Rock, MI

Introduction

The question of Scriptural authority emerged as the foundational issue of the Reformation on April 18, 1521, at the Diet of Worms. In response to the request that he repudiate his writings, Martin Luther said, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

Definition: “Sola Scriptura means that only Scripture, because it is God’s inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.”¹

“Doctrine:”² The Bible really does teach *sola scriptura*.I. The biblical story logically upholds *sola scriptura*.

Creation
Mt. Sinai
The prophets
Jesus
The apostles
The church

II. Biblical texts specifically teach *sola scriptura*.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

A. God gave us his powerful words in Scripture (inspired). 16a

¹ Matthew Barrett, *God’s Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 23.

² This sermon has two parts labeled “doctrine” and “use,” an homage to the great Puritan scholar, William Perkins (1558—1602) who advised his pupils to formulate their sermons according to this division. See his, *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

1. Because God's words are Scripture, we can understand them (perspicuous).
2. Because Scripture is God's words, we must believe it (inerrant).

B. God applies his powerful words to transform us (infallible). 16b

1. His words teach us what is true.
2. His words rebuke us when we are wrong.
3. His words empower us do what is right.
4. His words guide us throughout life.

C. God uses his powerful words to equip us for all He requires (sufficient) 17

“Use: Therefore we have a legacy to entrust to the next generation by upholding it in our own.

I. Challenges to *sola scriptura* exist today among heirs of the Reformation.

Some frequently misunderstand and misapply *sola scriptura*.

- A. They think it means the Scriptures without history (*nuda scriptura*).
- B. They think it means the Scriptures without community (*solo scriptura*).
- C. They think it means the Scriptures without boundaries (*exlex scriptura*).

II. To address these challenges, in our churches we must:

- A. Cultivate a taste for historical theology and its importance.
- B. Establish meaningful, visible relationships that coalesce around our common faith.
- C. Uphold the teaching and preaching of the “plain sense” of Scripture as the centerpiece of what we do.