

Sola Scriptura

We just studied Hezekiah's reforms from 715 BC. Josiah also had a massive reform in the 600's BC. Ezra and Nehemiah were reformers at the time of the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity. But what we mean when we say "the Reformation" is a series of monumental changes that took place in Europe from the late 1300's through the 1500's where men of God rose up to correct what they saw as the corruption and errors of the Roman Catholic church, very often at the cost of their lives.

There are 5 distinct "solas" (Latin phrases) that describe the main areas of emphasis during the Reformation, and what especially distinguishes Protestantism from Roman Catholicism.

1. Sola Scriptura "Scripture Alone"
2. Sola Fide "Faith Alone"
3. Solus Christus "Christ Alone"
4. Sola Gratia "Grace Alone"
5. Soli Deo Gloria "To the Glory of God Alone"

Today we will concentrate on "Sola Scriptura". Its basic meaning is that the Bible contains all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life, and so our faith and doctrinal beliefs must come from scripture alone, not from church traditions or papal pronouncements, and that every one of us has a personal right and responsibility to read, interpret, and obey the teachings of the Bible.

The context of the Reformation period was a Catholic church that taught that only the priests could read and understand the Bible, and that from the Latin Vulgate only. There was no concern for what the original versions in Hebrew and Greek might say, and there was fear and loathing of the idea of translating the Bible from original languages into the common languages. Their objection was not that the translations would be badly done, but that the common people must be kept in ignorance of its contents, to maintain ecclesiastical and even civil control in the hands of the church, and ultimately the pope. To this end, many men were relentlessly tracked down, imprisoned, and burned at the stake. As many of the translated Bibles as they could obtain, were publicly burned.

So the Reformation was a reaction away from the total control of the Roman Catholic church, with a recognition of the right and responsibility of the individual to know and act on the truth for themselves. It was not a rejection of "church" altogether, but a rejection of Catholic sacerdotalism (religion rigidly controlled by a formal priesthood), and a recognition of the "priesthood of believers" (1 P. 2:9).

Satan has always hated, and tried to destroy the Word. It was burned by Roman emperors and then by the Roman Catholic church, and more recently by Communist regimes, as the USSR and China. Why? Because the Word of God is Truth and to read and understand it is liberating. That is not good, for those who want to maintain a position of power over others.

I see three major divisions of church history, with respect to the Word.

Stage 1: Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew (OT) and Greek (NT). All scriptures were painstakingly copied by hand, by scribes. Actual copies of scripture were thus relatively rare and expensive. Scriptures were publicly read, taught, and expounded upon.

60-310 AD – Christianity was persecuted by the Roman emperors in spurts of varying intensity. Christians were martyred and their scriptures were burned. However, believers continued to proliferate and their writings could not be totally eliminated.

313 AD (or so) – **Emperor Constantine** made Christianity legal and even favored. While he may have been well-intentioned, the result was a flooding of the church with unconverted heathens and their customs.

382 AD (or so) – **Jerome** translated the Bible into Latin, called **the Vulgate**, which became the Catholic standard from then on. However, over time most people became unable to understand Latin, or even to read (the "Dark Ages"). Christian biblical scholarship was confined to the monasteries.

During this time and especially in the 1200's, the common people were forbidden to own or read Bibles, and were forced to rely on priests. There was even a list of forbidden books (clear up until 1966!).

1380-84 England – **John Wycliffe** opposed the church on several issues like transubstantiation, but most notably put out the first complete translation of the Bible into English. He believed that the Bible was the only reliable guide for our belief and church practice, and should be available to everyone in their own language. He died in 1384, but in 1428 was condemned by an English bishop who ordered his bones to be dug up and burned, and cast into the river Swift.

Stage 2: Around 1455, **Gutenberg** invented the printing press and put out the first printed version of the Latin Vulgate. This was a world-changing event in that it enabled Bibles and other books to be mass-produced and so more economical and accessible to normal people.

Around the 1520's, **William Tyndale** began translating the Bible into English, which could have wider distribution because they could be printed. He was betrayed in 1536 and burned at the stake. The Tyndale version was a large influence when the King James version was done.

Also in early 1500's **Martin Luther** became the major trigger of the Reformation, and made a translation of the Bible into German.

In the mid to late 1500's, the **Geneva Bible** was produced with chapter and verse divisions and footnotes, and was the first commonly available English Bible. It was the Bible used by the Pilgrims, and is still available in either the 1560 or the 1599 editions.

The **King James Bible** is called the "Authorized Version", of 1611 and has been predominant in the English speaking world ever since.

Stage 3: Since the Bible is so easily printed and distributed, and has been translated into so many languages, the opposition has gone (mostly) from direct to indirect. Instead of trying to wipe out physical Bibles, or punish the translators, the devil has inspired various means of destroying confidence in the Word.

Examples of modern attacks on the Book:

1. "The 'Word' is in the Bible somewhere, but we cannot say the Bible is the Word."
2. "Just written by men, it has contradictions, it's just a lot of legends and myths"
3. "It is not to be taken literally - only as allegory, etc."
4. "You fundamentalists are worshipping a book."
5. "The Bible is irrelevant in this modern world."
6. "Evolution and modern science disprove the Creation and Flood stories."
7. "The Bible can't be true because miracles don't happen."
8. "How do we know the right books are in there?"
9. "The OT was written much later than it purports to be and not by the supposed authors."
10. "We don't have any of the original Scriptures, so how do we know they haven't been changed?"
11. "There are so many translations – how can I know which is the right one?"
12. "The Bible is hate speech because of what it says about LGBTXYZ."

Now as much as in any time of history, we must stand confidently on the Bible as the Word of God, true and reliable, the only standard of truth, and we must each one personally take our responsibility to read and study it, and to guide our lives by it.

2 Tim. 3:15-17 – And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.