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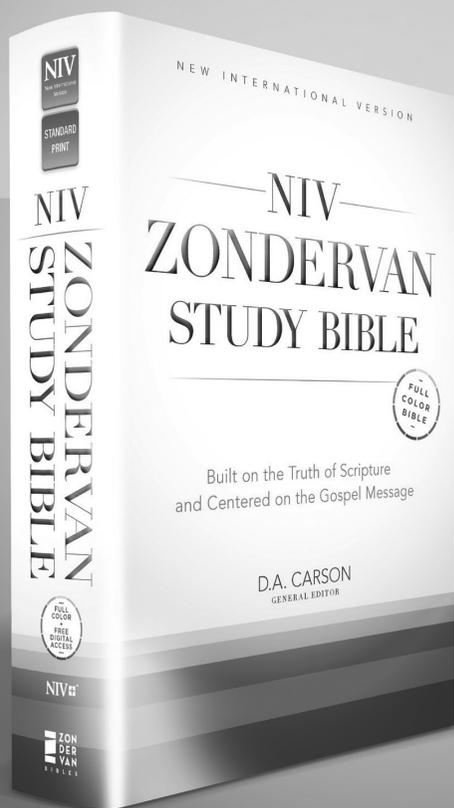
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# Editorial: Remembering the Reformation by Reflecting on its *Solas*

**STEPHEN J. WELLUM**

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Next year the Church will celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Historians usually date the start of the Reformation to the 1517 publication of Martin Luther's "95 Theses." On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a German Augustinian monk, posted his theses on a church door in the university town of Wittenberg. Probably not fully aware of what this act would enflame, Luther was simply following a common academic practice of the day. By nailing his theses to the church door, he was inviting people to debate some of the specifics of Roman Catholic theology and practice, especially the practice of indulgences. But unbeknown to Luther, this act is now viewed as the start of the Reformation which spread like wildfire in the German states, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Scotland, and portions of France, and it produced pastors and theologians such as Huldreich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, and the richness of the entire post-Reformation theological tradition, which reverberates to our own day.

Beyond question, the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century changed Christianity forever. The Reformation was not perfect, but it was a mighty

reviving movement of the Spirit of God which purified the Church and called people back to the fundamentals of the Gospel. In so doing, it removed from our thinking the emphasis of human autonomy and human tradition as equal in authority to God's Word; it recovered the God-centeredness of all of life and thought by glorying in the triune God of the Bible in all of his majestic rule and Lordship; it emphasized the importance yet pervasive depravity of human beings as image-bearers; it stressed the utter inability of humans to save themselves thus proclaiming the need for God to redeem us by his sovereign grace alone; and it exalted the glory, majesty, exclusivity, and sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ who alone has accomplished our salvation fully, completely, and perfectly.

To attempt to capture and unpack the extraordinary impact of the Reformation on the Church and her theology, let alone its impact on the larger society is not possible here. In fact, world history would look quite different apart from the influence of the Reformation in a whole host of areas. Over the next year, as the Reformation is remembered and celebrated, many of the lasting legacies of the Reformation will be discussed in books, magazines, and social media. Yet, one way of remembering the legacy of the Reformation is by reflecting on five *solas*, or Latin phrases that emerged during and after the Reformation, which nicely captured some of the Reformers' crucial theological convictions central to the Reformation and the Gospel. The five *solas* are as follows: 1. *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"). 2. *Sola Fide* ("faith alone"). 3. *Sola Gratia* ("grace alone"). 4. *Solus Christus* ("through Christ alone"). 5. *Soli Deo Gloria* ("to the glory of God alone").

In order to accomplish the task of remembering the legacy of the Reformation by reflecting on its *solas*, on September 24-25, 2015, a theology conference was held on the campus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to do just that. The articles in this issue of *SBJT* are the presentations of that conference. In addition, these articles are also summaries of individual books that have been written by the presenters on each of the *solas*. Zondervan is publishing each of these monographs, and as of the publication of this issue of *SBJT*, two of the books have already been published (*Faith Alone* by Thomas Schreiner and *God's Glory Alone* by David VanDrunen) with the remaining three books to be published this year (*Scripture Alone* by Matthew Barrett, *Grace Alone* by Carl Trueman, and *Christ Alone* by myself).

Why are these five *solas* helpful in remembering the extraordinary legacy

of the Reformation? Ultimately the answer to this question takes us to the heart of Christian theology. The *solas* remind us about the God-centered nature of Christianity and how human beings, as important as we are as image-bearers, are completely dependent upon God's sovereign initiative to create, reveal, rule, and redeem. Everything we have in this life and the life to come is due to God's grace, planning, initiative, self-communication, and self-giving.

Think, for example, of *sola Scriptura*. Apart from God's initiative to speak to us in an authoritative, reliable, and sufficient way, we would not know God in a true, objective manner. No doubt, in creating the world, God has made himself known in creation which reflects his plan (general revelation), but to know God's plan, purposes, and will, we need a specific Word-revelation, which serves as our final and ultimate authority. In addition, we need a Word which is first-order, that is, objectively God's Word through human authors, so that our second-order interpretations, whether as individuals or collectively as the Church, can be corrected in light of Scripture alone. This does not mean that historical theology, tradition, and confessions are not helpful in our reading and application of Scripture. But it is an important reminder that our confessions or "the rule of faith" are secondary standards which must correspond to Scripture otherwise they are not true and reliable. Today, this stress on God's self-communication and his authoritative Word must be heard again by the Church, as we have the tendency to elevate our thought and experience over Scripture which is another way of denying or minimizing God's holy Word.

Or think of the importance of *solus Christus* and its relationship to *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. Given our human sin, we need our triune God to provide for us a covenant head who will not only represent us but act as our penal substitute. In *Christ alone*, we have such a glorious Savior who meets our every need. In God the Son incarnate, we have a Redeemer, who can meet his own demand against us because he is God the Son, yet he can also represent us and act as our substitute because he is the *incarnate* Son. Given *who* he is and *what* he does, it is no wonder that we can add nothing to his work, and the only way to receive him is by raising the empty hands of faith (*sola fide*). And in so doing, we realize that from beginning to end our salvation is a result of God's sovereign grace (*sola gratia*), who loved us before the foundation of the world, planned our eternal salvation, and sent

our glorious Lord and Savior to accomplish everything we need, even to the application of his work to us by the Spirit of God. It is no wonder that our whole life is to be lived *solī deo Gloria*, because this universe is God's and, we as his creatures have been created to know, adore, obey, and serve *him*. To substitute any created thing for him not only is a denial of his glory, but it is utter foolishness on our part. The glory of the Gospel is that the triune God of Scripture has created us for himself and that in Christ, all of God's promises are yes and amen.

In reading this issue of *SBJT*, which seeks to give God thanks for the Reformation and how God worked so mightily, powerfully, and graciously in the Reformers, we do so by remembering what is at the heart and soul of the Gospel itself: the glorious, gracious triune God who deserves all of our worship, adoration, and our lives, for his glory and for the good of the Church. May these articles stir in your heart a renewed appreciation for grace and the centrality, majesty, and worthiness of our great triune Creator-Covenant God. *Solī Deo Gloria*.