

THE “FIVE SOLAS” OF OUR FAITH

Session Three: Sola Scriptura The Scriptures as the Path to Salvation

The doctrine that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority was the “Formal Principle” of the Reformation. In 1521 at the historic interrogation of Luther at the Diet (Conference) of Worms (a city in Germany), he declared his conscience to be captive to the Word of God saying, *“Unless I am overcome with testimonies from Scripture or with evident reasons -- for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils, since they have often erred and contradicted one another -- I am overcome by the Scripture texts which I have put forward, and my conscience is bound by God's Word.”*

Similarly, the Belgic Confession stated, *“We believe that this Holy Scripture contains the will of God completely and that everything one must believe to be saved is sufficiently taught in it. For since the entire manner of service which God requires of us is described in it at great length, no one ought to teach other than what the Holy Scriptures have already taught us... Therefore we must not consider human writings—no matter how holy their authors may have been—equal to the divine writings; nor may we put custom, nor the majority, nor age, nor the passage of times or persons, nor councils, decrees, or official decisions above the truth of God... Therefore, we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule.”* (VII).

Luther and his Reformation contemporaries compared what the church was teaching about salvation – the Sacraments, Merits, Purgatory, Relics, Indulgences – and determined that the Bible does not teach these as the path to salvation. In fact, with the exception of Baptism and Communion – defined as “the means of grace by which one enters and sustains the Christian life” – these other doctrines are absent from Scripture.

Instead, the Reformers taught that people are put right with God By Faith Alone, in Jesus Christ Alone; that every believer has direct access to God through God’s Grace Alone; and that the Scriptures Alone are the sole source of authority for faith and life, all to the Glory of God alone.

“By faith alone” meant that you no longer had to go through an elaborate series of rituals or relics to achieve forgiveness of sins. The path to God was and is through faith in “Jesus Christ Alone”; through believing that in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, God has come to the world, has died for the world, has paid the price for the sin of the world, and is risen to new life and salvation for the world. It is through Christ

that we come to know God as a loving parent. Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the determination to follow him as Saviour and Lord, is the way to salvation.

The Reformation recovered this central idea of faith in Jesus Christ - By Faith, By Grace, By Scripture – all to the Glory of God. We do not earn our salvation through good works: we respond to our salvation with good works. It is a free, but priceless gift.

Some Important Salvation Scriptures for the Reformers

Romans 3:22-24 - God makes people right with himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same: Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard, and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-10 - As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 - You have been taught the Holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

John 20:30-31 - Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Martin Luther's Early Years: A Gallery of Friends and Enemies

by Paul Thigpen (excerpts from Christian History Issue 34, 1992)

Johann von Staupitz (1469?—1524) - Luther's "most beloved father in Christ"

Johann von Staupitz, the dean of the theological faculty at the University of Wittenberg became Luther's spiritual adviser when Luther came to study there in 1508. Staupitz, like Luther an Augustinian friar, guided his younger colleague toward Bible study and convinced him to study for the doctorate in theology. Luther addressed his esteemed mentor as his "most beloved father in Christ."

The older man's personal piety and humility deeply influenced the reformer. But Staupitz couldn't always understand the younger man's inner struggles. Luther's scrupulous conscience led him to unceasingly confess his sins to Staupitz. Exasperated, Staupitz exclaimed: "Man, God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. Don't you know that God commands you to hope?"

Summoned to Rome for a hearing in 1518, Luther longed to have his mentor nearby for moral support. When the cardinal in charge of the hearing concluded Luther was a heretic, Staupitz—who was vicar-general of Germany's Augustinian friars—released Luther from his vow of obedience to the order. He may have been trying to distance himself from the outspoken friar, or he may have wanted to set Luther free. Whatever the case, Luther felt abandoned. "I was excommunicated three times," he said later, "first by Staupitz, second by the pope, and third by the emperor." In his last letter to Luther, however, Staupitz said that his love for Luther had never been broken, though he didn't understand the direction Luther had taken.

In later years Luther praised Staupitz for having led him into a knowledge of God's grace. "If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz," he said, "I should have sunk in hell."

Leo X (1475–1521) - Prodigal pope who sought income from indulgences

Extravagant son of a notorious Renaissance family, Giovanni de' Medici was made a cardinal at the age of 13 and became Pope Leo X at 38. Pleasure-loving and easy-going, Leo went on a wild spending spree as soon as he ascended the papal throne. Leo's plans for rebuilding St. Peter's Basilica were estimated to cost over a million ducats. Within two years as pope, Leo had squandered the fortune left by his predecessor and was in serious financial embarrassment.

To keep up with his expenditures, his officials created more than two thousand saleable church offices during his reign. The sale of indulgences provided the pope with yet another source of income. To pay for St. Peter's, offset the costs of a war, and finance

his extravagant lifestyle, the pope issued an indulgence for special sale in Germany. A Dominican, Johann Tetzel, was given the task of promotion, Luther reacted with his theses, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Leo condemned Luther's teachings in 1520 with the bull *Exsurge Domine*, calling the reformer "a wild boar" who had invaded "the Lord's vineyard." When Luther refused to recant, Leo excommunicated him and called for the secular government to punish him.

In 1521 Leo's armies defeated the French at Milan. He celebrated the triumph with an all-night banquet, from which he caught a chill, developed a fever, and died. In a brief seven years he had spent an estimated five million ducats and left behind a debt of nearly another million. With the papal coffers empty and the papal residence plundered, Leo's coffin had to be lit by half-burned candles borrowed from another funeral.

Johann Tetzel (1465?—1519) - Peddler of indulgences

In 1516 the Dominican friar Johann Tetzel came to Germany, preaching Pope Leo X's indulgence to raise church funds. Soon the jingle was echoing: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Tetzel's sermons were crassly flamboyant as he played on the fears of simple people. "Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends," he told them, "beseeching you and saying, 'Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance.'"

Luther regarded Tetzel as "the primary author of this tragedy," and it was Tetzel's commercialism that incited Luther to post his 95 Theses. Tetzel replied with his own 106 Theses. For his actions Tetzel earned a sharp rebuke from the papal envoy and the scorn of the local populace. As Tetzel lay dying in 1519, however, Luther wrote him a letter of comfort: "Don't take it too hard. You didn't start this racket."

Johan Maier Eck (1486–1543) - "That monster" who fiercely debated Luther

Professor of theology at the University of Ingolstadt, Eck was on good terms with Luther until the controversy over indulgences broke out. Eck's attack on Luther's theses especially galled the reformer, not only because Eck was an old friend, but also because he was—unlike those "perfidious Italians" who opposed Luther—a fellow German.

A public debate was arranged in 1519 at the University of Leipzig, with Eck on the one side and Luther (with fellow reformer Karlstadt) on the other. The scene was tense: Leipzig's town council provided Eck with a bodyguard of seventy-six men, while Luther and Karlstadt arrived in town with two hundred students armed with battle-axes. Charges and countercharges flew in sharp repartee for eighteen days.

The debate turned the focus of the controversy from indulgences to spiritual authority. Did the church have the right to issue indulgences? At last, the patron of Leipzig who hosted the debate, Duke George the Bearded, called it to a halt.

The next year Eck helped procure Luther's condemnation in the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*. The pope appointed Eck as his nuncio and special inquisitor to publish the document in the German areas of Franconia and Bavaria. But Eck met with considerable opposition. In Leipzig he had to hide for his life in a cloister; in Wittenberg, his own works were burned by university students, along with canon law and the papal bull. For the rest of his life, Eck organized Catholic opposition to the Lutheran Reformation.

Andreas Karlstadt (1480?—1541) - The reforming “Judas” more radical than Luther

Andreas Karlstadt was a leading light on the faculty of the University of Wittenberg. In 1518 Karlstadt published his own theses setting forth reformation principles. At Leipzig the next year, he joined Luther in the debate against Eck.

Karlstadt emerged as a radical in the Reformation. In 1521 he held the first Protestant communion service - without vestments for the clergy, and with both bread and wine served to the laity. The next day he announced his intent to marry, a stunning move in an age of celibate ministers. He soon opposed Luther as a proponent of compromise.

In 1524 Luther issued a tract that attacked Karlstadt's extreme ideas as the work of a new “Judas.” Karlstadt had to flee Wittenberg, and he denounced Luther as twice a papist and a cousin of Antichrist. But the next year on Luther's wedding night, at eleven o'clock when all the wedding guests had departed, Karlstadt showed up at his door, fleeing the Peasants' War and asking for shelter. Luther took him in.

Karlstadt eventually joined the Zwinglian branch of the Reformation and settled in Basel, Switzerland, where he died of the plague.

Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1534) - Judge for Luther's hearing

Cajetan was an Italian bishop, cardinal, theologian, and general of the Dominican Order. He was put in charge of Luther's hearing at Augsburg in 1518, a stormy encounter that lasted three days. Cajetan had promised to proceed as a “father” rather than a “judge,” but his instructions from Rome allowed for no discussion of the issues.

On the first day of the hearing, Luther prostrated himself in a gesture of humility, and the cardinal raised him up in a gesture of reconciliation. But Cajetan then informed Luther that he must recant immediately. Cajetan finally concluded the reformer was an obstinate heretic. For his part, Luther characterized Cajetan as a man no more fit to handle his case than an ass was fit to play a harp.

Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) - “The teacher of Germany”

When Philipp Melanchthon delivered his inaugural lecture in 1518 as the new professor of Greek at Wittenberg, his fellow faculty member Luther listened expectantly. The young scholar stammered, but when he called for theologians to go “back to the sources, back to the Holy Scriptures,” Luther rejoiced. He had found a brilliant new ally.

Melanchthon soon came under Luther’s influence, taking up the study of theology, and he accompanied the reformer to the Leipzig Debate in 1519. Before long Melanchthon was publishing his own views, strengthening the reformed position with his careful, precise reasoning. He differed with Luther on some issues. But on the whole, he took the teachings of “the charioteer of Israel,” as he liked to call the reformer, and cast them into a more rational and systematic form.

Melanchthon was a peacemaker. In addition, Melanchthon’s extensive efforts to develop the German educational system earned him the title “the teacher of Germany.” Luther openly admitted that without Melanchthon’s methodological skills, his own, largely unsystematic work would have been lost.

Frederick III “The Wise” (1463–1525) - Elector of Saxony, Protector of Luther

Frederick III, was both an avid collector of relics and a supporter of modern scholarship. He was educated at an Augustinian monastery and made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He collected religious relics—19,013 of them, in fact, by the year 1520—with the wish that Wittenberg, as a depository of sacred items, would become the Rome of Germany. He had such rarities (it was claimed) as four hairs from the Virgin Mary, a strand of Jesus’ beard, and a piece of the bread eaten at the Last Supper.

The pious Frederick also founded the University of Wittenberg in 1502. After inviting Luther (and later Melanchthon) to teach there, he found himself having to protect his troublesome professor of Bible. When in 1518 Luther was summoned to Rome for a hearing, Frederick intervened and arranged for the meeting to take place on safer German soil. He also refused to execute the 1520 papal bull that condemned Luther. And after the Diet of Worms placed the reformer under an imperial ban, Frederick secretly offered him refuge at his castle, the Wartburg.

The Saxon ruler’s reputation for justice earned him the title “the Wise,” but Luther noted his cautious nature and took to calling him “the hesitater.” His chaplain and secretary, Georg Spalatin, made him familiar with Lutheran teaching, but scholars debate how much of it Frederick accepted.

Georg Spalatin (1484–1545) - Go-between and confidant

When the disturbing political implications of Luther's teaching grew clear, he needed a friend in high places. That friend appeared in the person of Georg Spalatin, the chaplain and secretary of Elector Frederick of Saxony.

Spalatin began studying at Wittenberg in 1511 and was soon brought under Luther's influence. When the pope summoned Luther to Rome for a hearing in 1518, Luther asked Frederick to move the meeting to Germany, and Spalatin became the middle man in the negotiations. He also accompanied Frederick to the Diets of Augsburg and Worms to help negotiate with Luther's opponents.

Spalatin supervised the publication of many of Luther's works and became a trusted friend. In 400 letters to Spalatin, Luther shared everything from the deeply personal and intimate (e.g., how Spalatin should make love to his bride!) to the mundane—"I have planted a garden and built a wall, both with marvelous success."

Charles V (1500–1558) - Defender of the Catholic faith

When Charles was elected emperor of the Holy Roman Empire at the age of 19, he became the most powerful man in Europe. His domains included Burgundy, the Netherlands, Naples, and Spain and Spanish America (and he laid claim to northern Italy as well). Though his rivals and enemies were formidable—France, the papacy, and the Turks—Charles's most urgent problem was the rise of the Lutheran movement.

After Luther's excommunication by the pope, he appealed to Charles: "For three years I have sought peace in vain. I have now but one recourse. I appeal to Caesar." Charles called Luther to appear before the Diet of Worms in 1521, an already scheduled council of the German rulers. After days of examining Luther, Charles called in the electors and other princes to read them his decision:

"A single friar who goes counter to all Christianity for a thousand years must be wrong. I have decided to mobilize everything against Luther: my kingdoms and dominions, my friends, my body, my blood, and my soul." The Edict of Worms, signed by Charles weeks later, banned Luther from the empire.

Girolamo Aleandro (1480–1542) - Scholar and vocal enemy

Aleandro was an Italian scholar of classical languages. He worked with Erasmus, introduced Greek studies into France, became rector of the University of Paris, and helped fan the flames of Renaissance learning that contributed so much to the Reformation. Nevertheless, he became one of Luther's most vocal enemies.

Pope Leo X sent Aleandro to present Luther with the bull *Exsurge Domine*, which condemned Luther's teachings and threatened excommunication. Aleandro also led the case against Luther at the Diet of Worms, a difficult task given Luther's popular support. As he wrote in a secret message to his superiors in Rome, "Nine-tenths of the people are shouting 'Luther!' and the other tenth are crying 'Death to the Roman Court!'"

Aleandro demanded a condemnation without trial and ordered Luther's books burned in several European cities. He also sent to the stake two monks preaching Luther's ideas in Antwerp—the first martyrs of the Reformation.

Katharina von Bora (1499-1552) – Luther's Wife and Support

If ever there were a power behind the throne, none was stronger than Katharina von Bora, or "Dear Kate," as Luther described his beloved wife. Her story is full of drama: Born of a noble but poor family, Katharina was only three when she was sent away to school and eventually took vows to become a nun. In April 1523, with the Reformation well under way, Katharina and 11 of her fellow nuns hid in a wagon and escaped from their Cistercian convent. Once the wagon arrived in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, she was taken in by the family of Lucas Cranach the Elder.

Although Katharina was courted by two men, she married neither. In the end, she said that she would only marry Martin Luther or his friend, Nicholas von Amsdorf.

Philipp Melancthon, one of Luther's closest friends, was shocked at the idea of Luther marrying; he believed a wedding would cause a scandal that could severely damage the Reformation and its cause. After pondering the matter for some time, Luther decided that his marriage "would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep." The result was the joining of a 42-year-old former monk and a 26-year-old former nun in holy matrimony on June 13, 1525.

By all accounts, it was a happy and affectionate marriage. Luther wrote that he loved waking up to see pigtailed nuns on the pillow next to him. He also admired Katharina's intellect, calling her "Doctora Lutherin." She bore six children, ran the household, and organized the family finances. Their home was in Lutherstadt Wittenberg's Black Monastery, the former Augustinian monastery where Luther had lived before the Reformation began.

Katharina was trusted in ways unheard of for women in those days. Luther allowed her to deal with his publishers and made her his sole heir.