



“at home, thinking”

seeds for a
Biblical worldview

“As a man thinketh in
his heart, so is he.”
Proverbs 23:7 KJV

No. 19

Five Pillars (Solas) of the Reformation

I HAVE BEEN THINKING about the *Five Pillars of the Reformation*. In the previous issue, (No. 18), I mentioned the Five Pillars of Islam. They are: Faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, daily prayers, alms-giving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

Whereas the Islamic pillars deal primarily with religious duties, the *Five Pillars of the Reformation*, also known as the *Five Solas*, each deal with our core, Christian beliefs. They establish a root system, or a matrix (No. 5) out of which our faith grows and is nurtured. Before we look at them though, let’s look first at the Latin word *sola*, and its significance in this fivefold distillation of core, Protestant beliefs.

The Latin word *sola* means “alone,” and is utilized in this application to distinguish Protestant beliefs from Catholic beliefs. The Reformers, seeking to reclaim what they concluded to be the essential truths of Christianity, sought to make clear that these five, named, central, cohesive elements of the Christian faith were not encumbered with man-made religious trappings. Thus they prefaced each cardinal component with this Latin word.

1. Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone): The Reformers believed the church had been weakened by the doctrine that only the Pope and church bishops were qualified to interpret Holy Scripture. They also rejected the Catholic teaching that “Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”⁽¹⁾ The Reformers renounced both of these doctrines, declaring Scripture alone as the sole source and inerrant rule for deciding issues of faith.



(1). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Logia 82

2. Solus Christus (by Christ alone): The Catholic church taught that Mary, the saints, and priests can act as mediators in bringing salvation to the sinner. The Reformers flatly rejected this doctrine, insisting that only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could mediate a reconciliation between a Holy God and sinful humankind. They declared that only the sacrifice, shed blood, and death of the sinless Christ is sufficient to breach the gap between estranged God and man.

3. Sola Gratia (by Grace alone): The word “grace” means unmerited favor. The Reformers believed that salvation comes by grace alone, that it is an absolute, undeserved, unearned, gift of God. The Catholic church from which the Reformers broke, taught otherwise, stressing baptism, penance, and the Eucharist as ways of meriting or earning salvation.

4. Sola Fide (by Faith alone): In 1517, Martin Luther posted his famed 95 theses in protest against the selling of indulgences by the Catholic church, and unexpectedly launched the Protestant Reformation. In contrast to the teachings of the Catholic church, Luther believed that only the faith of the believer in the pure grace of God (see above), can bring salvation. Through faith, the Christian appropriates the obedience of Christ, making him/her acceptable in the eyes of a Holy God.

5. Sola Deo Gloria (for God’s Glory alone): The Reformers challenged the Catholic church regarding her glorification of idols and images. They also claimed that the office of the Pope glorified men instead of God. Likewise, they objected to the glorification of Mary, who was elevated to equality with Christ. *Sola Deo Gloria* became the preeminent doctrine of the Reformation.



“at home, thinking” is published periodically by Mark W. Weaver, co-author of *The Century War Chronicles* and co-founder of Reconciliation Press. Mark is married with three grown daughters, and has been employed in the real estate and land development industry for over thirty years. Mark and his wife, Sally, fellowship at a house church in their home town of Manassas, Virginia. Copyright © 2006 Mark W. Weaver

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