Small Group Guide: Reformation Day

The Five Solas and the Authority of Scripture



Overview

This week's sermon walked through the history of the Reformation, the men who paved the way for it, and the theological convictions that united reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Wesley. At the heart of the Reformation was a return to Scripture as the highest and only infallible authority for the church, and the recovery of the gospel summarized in the five solas: grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

Key Takeaways

- The Reformation did not begin with Martin Luther. Reformers like Peter Waldo, Jan Hus, and John Wycliffe all fought for the common person's access to Scripture and full participation in the life of the church long before Luther nailed his 95 Theses.
- Luther's central conviction was not to destroy the church but to reform it by returning to Scripture as the church's infallible guide.

- The five solas -- grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone -- are not Protestant inventions. They are drawn directly from Scripture, particularly passages like Romans 3 and Ephesians 2.
- Many of the most respected church fathers, including Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa, affirmed that Scripture serves as the ultimate authority and umpire for Christian doctrine.
- Salvation is entirely the work of God. There is nothing in our justification that we contribute or can boast about. Even the good works we do after justification are works God prepared in advance for us to walk in.
- Protestant unity is not found in institutional uniformity but in shared commitment to the true gospel. A Baptist, a Methodist, a Lutheran, and a non-denominational believer can be in full communion because the church is where the true gospel is found, not where the true institution is found.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Before this sermon, what did you know about the Reformation and Martin Luther? Did anything you heard surprise or challenge what you previously thought?
2. The pastor described Luther as a man tormented by guilt who could find no relief through confession, penance, or pilgrimage. Have you ever experienced a season where religious activity left you feeling empty rather than at peace? What did that feel like?

Scripture and Authority

3. The pastor quoted Augustine as saying he would not accept a teaching as true simply because a bishop held it, but only if it could be demonstrated through Scripture or sound reason. How does that posture toward authority shape the way you personally evaluate teaching you hear, whether from a pastor, a book, a podcast, or a church tradition?
4. John Chrysostom said that if anyone agrees with the Scriptures, he is a Christian. How does that definition of Christian identity compare to the way you typically think about what makes someone a Christian?

5. Sola scriptura does not mean Scripture is the only authority we have. It means Scripture is the only infallible authority we have. What is the difference between those two statements? How does that distinction help you think about the role of pastors, councils, creeds, and church tradition in your own life?

The Gospel and the Five Solas

7. Read Romans 3:19-26 together as a group. In your own words, what is Paul's argument? What problem is he diagnosing, and what solution is he pointing to?
8. Read Ephesians 2:8-10 together. Paul says we are saved by grace through faith, not of works, and then in the very next breath says we were created for good works. How do you hold those two things together? What is the difference between works that save and works that flow from salvation?
9. The five solas are: grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. Which of these five is most personally meaningful to you right now, and why?
10. The pastor said that when churches add requirements to the gospel, they give people things to boast about and things to do in order to contribute to their own salvation. Can you think of ways that even Protestant churches or individual Christians sometimes fall into the same trap of adding to the gospel, even subtly?

Personal Reflection

11. Luther found no peace through religious activity. He only found peace when he was sent back to the Scriptures. What role does personal engagement with Scripture play in your own life right now? Is it a source of peace and direction, or does it feel more like an obligation?
12. The sermon closed with the statement that it is Jesus on the cross who did the work, not us, and that we have nothing to boast about. How does it affect the way you live day to day when you genuinely believe that your standing before God is entirely secure because of what Christ did and not because of what you do?

Practical Applications

- **Read Romans 3 and Ephesians 2 on your own this week.** Read them slowly, as if for the first time. Ask yourself what Paul is actually arguing and how it applies to your understanding of salvation.
- **Evaluate what you are trusting in.** Take an honest inventory of your spiritual life. Are there practices, habits, or religious activities you are relying on, even partially, to maintain your standing before God? Bring those to Scripture and ask whether they are expressions of faith or attempts to contribute to your justification.
- **Learn the five solas.** Memorize the phrase: justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. Consider writing it somewhere you will see it daily this week.
- **Thank God specifically for what He has done.** Set aside time in prayer this week to thank God not for what you have done or plan to do, but specifically for the finished work of Christ on your behalf. Practice giving Him the glory that belongs entirely to Him.
- **Engage someone in conversation about the gospel.** The Reformation was, at its core, about making the gospel accessible to ordinary people. Think of one person in your life who does not clearly understand what it means to be justified by grace through faith. Pray for an opportunity to share it with them in simple terms this week.

Closing Prayer

Close your group time by praying together, thanking God that salvation is entirely His work, that He is both the just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus, and asking Him to give your group a deeper love for Scripture as the living and authoritative word He has given His church.

5-Day Reformation Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide



Day 1: The Authority of Scripture

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Devotional: The Word of God is not a relic of the past. It is the living, breathing foundation of the Christian life. Paul reminds Timothy that the Scriptures he received from childhood are sufficient to make him wise for salvation. Every doctrine you need, every correction your soul requires, every instruction for righteous living is already contained within the pages of God's Word. You do not need additional traditions or councils to complete what God has already provided. The Bible is not a starting point from which the church must build. It is the umpire, the final authority, the voice of God himself.

Reflection: What areas of your life have you been allowing human tradition or opinion to carry more weight than Scripture?

Application: Choose one area of your faith this week and examine it directly against the text of Scripture. Let the Word correct or confirm what you believe.

Day 2: The Condition of Humanity

Reading: Romans 3:9-20

Devotional: Before the good news can be received, the bad news must be understood. Paul draws from multiple Old Testament texts to paint a picture of humanity apart from God. There is none who seeks after God. There is none who does good. This is not merely a description of the notoriously wicked. It is a description of all of us. The law does not save. It exposes. It holds a mirror to our faces and reveals what we truly are. This is not meant to crush you. It is meant to drive you to the only One who can do what the law never could.

Reflection: Have you honestly reckoned with the depth of your own sinfulness before a holy God?

Application: Spend time in honest prayer today, acknowledging specific areas of sin without excuse or minimization, trusting that honesty before God is the beginning of genuine repentance.

Day 3: Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone

Reading: Romans 3:21-26

Devotional: Here is the turning point. Paul has established that every human being stands guilty before God. Now he reveals the answer, and it does not come from within us. The righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law. It comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. God himself set forth his Son as the propitiation, the full and satisfying payment for sin. There is nothing left for you to add. The debt has been paid. The work has been finished. Your salvation rests entirely on what Christ accomplished, not on what you perform. This is the heartbeat of Reformation theology and of the gospel itself.

Reflection: Are you resting fully in the finished work of Christ, or are you quietly trusting in your own religious performance?

Application: Write down the five solas: grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. Meditate on each one and consider how it challenges or shapes your daily walk with God.

Day 4: No Room for Boasting

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotional: Paul makes the logic of grace airtight. You were dead in your trespasses. Dead people do not contribute to their own resurrection. God, who is rich in mercy, made you alive together with Christ. Even the faith through which you receive salvation is described as a gift, not something you generated from within yourself. And then Paul does something remarkable. He acknowledges that believers are created for good works, but even those works were prepared in advance by God. You walk in them, but he designed them. There is no corner of your salvation or your sanctification where boasting is permitted. All glory belongs to God alone.

Reflection: In what ways do you subtly take credit for your spiritual growth or standing before God?

Application: Throughout this day, practice redirecting credit for any good you do toward God in prayer. Let every act of obedience become an act of worship by acknowledging that he is the source.

Day 5: Returning to the Foundation

Reading: Galatians 1:6-9

Devotional: Paul's alarm in this passage is striking. He expresses astonishment that believers are so quickly turning to a different gospel. His warning is severe: if anyone, even an angel, preaches a gospel other than what was delivered by the apostles, let him be accursed. The Reformation was, at its core, a return to this warning. Centuries of tradition had layered additions onto the gospel until the pure message of grace through faith in Christ was obscured beneath requirements, rituals, and systems of human merit. The call of Reformation Day is not merely historical. It is personal. Guard the gospel. Return to the Scriptures. Hold fast to what was once for all delivered to the saints.

Reflection: What voices in your life, whether cultural, religious, or personal, are subtly reshaping the gospel you believe?

Application: Read through a summary of the five solas once more and share the gospel with someone this week using only what Scripture teaches, trusting that the Word itself carries the power to save.