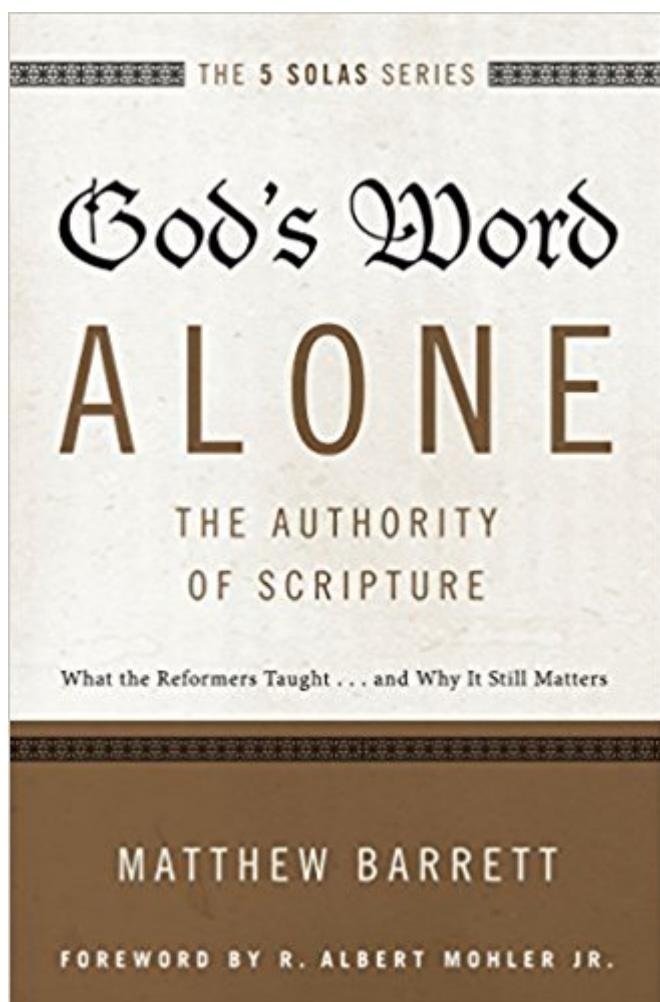


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God's Word Alone---The Authority Of Scripture: What The Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters (The Five Solas Series)



Synopsis

Historians and theologians alike have long recognized that at the heart of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation were five declarations (or *solas*) that distinguished the movement from other expressions of the Christian faith. Five hundred years later, we live in a different time with fresh challenges to our faith. Yet these rallying cries of the Reformation continue to speak to us, addressing a wide range of contemporary issues. The Five Solas series will help you understand the historical and biblical context of the five solas and how to live out the relevance of Reformation theology today. In *God's Word Alone* "The Authority of Scripture, scholar and pastor Matthew Barrett looks at the historical and biblical roots of the doctrine that Scripture alone is the final and decisive authority for God's people. He examines the development of this theme in the Reformation and traces the crisis that followed resulting in a shift away from the authority of Scripture. Barrett shows that we need to recover a robust doctrine of Scripture's authority in the face of today's challenges and why a solid doctrinal foundation built on God's Word is the best hope for the future of the church.

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Customer Reviews

God's Word Alone is both a fitting tribute to its Reformation sola namesake and a constructive contribution to the doctrine of Scripture in its own right. *Sola scriptura* has become something of a whipping concept in contemporary theology, but Barrett's book goes a long way to correcting

modern and postmodern caricatures of the doctrine. I particularly appreciated the chapters on the Reformers' own understanding of Scripture as the supreme and final authority for the church and how this is rooted in its being the only wholly reliable authority, a consequence of its nature as divinely authored and inspired. Barrett here covers all the theological bases – biblical, historical, and systematic – as one might expect of a home run. -- Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Perhaps the greatest crisis in the evangelical world today is the loss of any meaningful commitment to the functional authority of Scripture. While lip service is paid to biblical inspiration and perhaps even some sense of the Bible's infallibility, the final, functional authority of inerrant Scripture to govern both our beliefs and behavior has gradually disappeared. This alone makes Matthew Barrett's book on *Sola Scriptura* so essential to the church in our day. If the Bible, and the Bible alone, isn't our final and determinative authority, the church will have lost its bearings and be cast hopelessly adrift on the sea of personal subjectivity. It is a massive understatement to say this book is much needed today. I cannot recommend it too highly. -- Sam Storms, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, OK

The 500th anniversary Luther's nailing the ninety-five theses to the door of the chapel of the Wittenberg Castle provides an eminently suitable occasion to remind ourselves of one of the five 'solas' of the Reformation: *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone. Matthew Barrett takes his readers through some of the controversies surrounding the Bible that have arisen across this last half-millennium, and competently demonstrates the relevance of the doctrine of Scripture in our day. In the final analysis, the issue is revelation: what is the locus of God's gracious self-disclosure -- God generously giving up his privacy, as Carl Henry used to say? -- D. A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

The Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* teaches that the Bible is the only infallible and sufficient rule for Christian faith and practice. Matthew Barrett's new study provides persuasive evidence that this doctrine is firmly rooted not only in the Reformation but in the Early Church and in Scripture itself. In very readable prose Barrett graciously provides thoughtful and nuanced responses to the objections of critics of this doctrine. Moreover, he demonstrates that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy has resided as a central teaching of the Western Christian churches since the Patristic era. This is a welcomed and much needed resource for Christians in a day in which much confusion exists regarding the doctrines of *sola Scriptura* and biblical inerrancy. For this reason, the volume belongs in the libraries not only of teachers, seminary students and pastors but laypersons as well. Highly recommended. -- John D. Woodbridge, Research Professor of Church History and Christian Thought, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

This book---what a feast! Appetizing opening chapters recount how the

Bibleâ™s authority came to be trashed in the modern West, even in many church circles. Then comes the main course: how Godâ™s saving work and presence have always intertwined with his written Word. Lastly, dessert: tasty slices of Scriptureâ™s truth, clarity, and sufficiency. A world awash in error and self-destruction cries out for meaning and direction. This book shows why skepticism of Scripture is a bad idea, and why devoting ourselves to studying, living and spreading the Word of God written--inspired, inerrant, and authoritative--holds such promise, for this world and the next. -- Robert W. Yarbrough, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

Without belief in Scripture alone as our supreme and trustworthy authority, the very faith of the church must totter. Dr. Barrett has mounted an impressive defence of the key Reformation doctrine of Scripture, demonstrating just how vital it remains today. This book will do great good in grounding the faith of a new generation. -- Michael Reeves, President and Professor of Theology, Union School of Theology, Oxford, England

Sometimes the doctrine of Scripture is treated as separate from the other doctrines of Christianity---as a sort of preamble to the faith. Helpfully, Barrett draws in the Bibleâ™s own Trinitarian, covenantal, and salvation-historical themes to offer a persuasive alternative to various attempts to evade scriptural authority. Itâ™s an argument, to be sure, but also an edifying essay that helps us to understand what weâ™re doing when we submit our reason to Godâ™s judging and saving speech. -- Michael Horton, J. G. Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

I welcome this fresh study of the formal principle of the Reformation---the belief that Godâ™s written Word is the inspired norm by which all other religious authorities and traditions must be judged. Evangelicals are Gospel people and Bible people, and this book shows why adherence to the latter is crucial for the advance of the former. -- Timothy George, Founding dean, Beeson Divinity School of Samford University

Every generation must think afresh what the foundations of its faith are. The Bible is the unchanging Word of God but our perceptions of its role and relevance deepen as we confront new challenges that our mission to the world throws up. In this clearly presented and closely argued book, Dr. Barrett takes us through the main issues of our time, showing how and why they have arisen and offering ways and means by which they may be addressed. This is a key work and a valuable resource for pastors, teachers and students alike. -- Gerald Bray, Research Professor of Divinity Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

Matthew Barrett (Ph.D., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, as well as executive editor of Credo Magazine. He is the editor of The Five Solas Series and the author of several books,

including God's Word Alone, Reformation Theology, Salvation by Grace, and Owen on the Christian Life.

From the period of the Reformation, Christians have had a succinct way to categorize priorities within the Christian life through the development of the five solas. These five solas, referring to grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, God's word alone, and God's glory alone set the basis for one of the most sweeping transformations in church history. They would define the ministry of Martin Luther as he countered the Catholic Church and have come to define essential life applications for Christianity. Yet in proclamation of these core solas, few comprehend the depths of what they mean. When a new book series was announced to (re)discover the principles contained within the five solas, I must confess it seemed more promotional to me. With the first book released in 2015, the final two are scheduled to be completed in 2017 in conjunction with the 500th anniversary of the commencement of the Reformation, the books seemed to be more of a gimmick. Yet with a team of top scholars (scholars such as Matthew Barrett, Carl Trueman, and Thomas Schreiner have all taken part), excellent research, and considerate writing the series is much more than a gimmick. While I cannot vouch for the entire series since I have not read them all (especially since two are yet to be released) those that I have looked at are phenomenal and lend much credibility to the entire set. The most recently released book, God's Word Alone by Matthew Barrett, is one that I have no hesitation in recommending to others. The topic of God's Word is not only vast in its own regard, but finds its influence in every other area of life. It makes addressing such a topic within a short amount of space very difficult. However, Barrett does a great job in presenting the material in a succinct and efficient manner without cutting any corners. His writing takes on three distinctive characteristics that make it a worthwhile read: Structure. The most beneficial aspect of God's Word Alone is the structure and layout of the information. This point alone is worthy of noting because it is not only the key strength of the book, but it impacts the other strengths. A study of doctrine usually requires distinctive materials in order to look at a particular doctrine from the necessary perspectives. However, Barrett has done well to structure his book around theology. Organized into three parts, each section examines the doctrine of Scripture from the three primary theological disciplines. Section one reads as a historical theology that shows the traditional doctrines of Scripture with a special emphasis on the Reformation period. Section two then takes the form of biblical theology, examining the doctrine of Scripture across the whole counsel of God's Word. The final part forms a systematic theology with each chapter taking a look at a different aspect of Scripture (the four topics include inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and

sufficiency). Thus, the author has looked at God's Word alone across multiple disciplines making this one of the most distinguished and comprehensive resources that a person can utilize in their study about the Word of God. StudyIt is certain that Barrett undertook an extensive amount of research when completing this book. It was not a simple task, yet he masterfully navigated the materials out there in order to present a comprehensive look. You cannot read this book without being thankful for the study that he did. Simplicity Finally, the information being present is at times complex. Tracking the different teachings, perspectives, and theories, not just in a modern era, but across all of history (biblical and historical) can generate convoluted information and confused understandings. However, Barrett writes in a way that is easy to follow and understand. Again, the structure that he has chosen helps this greatly. While the strength of the book is found in its structure, study, and simplicity, there are two areas of improvement that would also benefit those areas. The first is simple formatting and layout issues. Periodically through the book there were issues with the page numbers (at one point my book went from page 371 to 335 to 350. At other points, the word order of the sentences did not make sense (most notably at the start of chapter 5). After several readings, I think I determined that somehow all of the words needed for the sentence were there, but their order had been tampered with. It is worth noting that the copy I used for review was the Kindle edition, and therefore these layout issues may only occur in the electronic edition of the book. A more extensive section on applicability would be beneficial. I recognize that book is already long (409 pages, counting the three appendices) and adding more application would only add to that. It is also worth noting that the author has included some application, especially in part three. However, those inclusions are brief and miss the extensiveness of application that results from a right theology of God's Word. In reality these issues are minor and constitute a very small portion. Even one of those issues may be specific to the Kindle edition of the book. Neither would prevent me from recommending this to others. This is a book that will anger some who are of the higher biblical criticism following. Suggesting that inerrancy is an indefensible and cringeworthy doctrine, they would disagree with the positions of Barrett. However, it is clear that he has an exalted view of God resulting in a high regard for God's Word. Because of that, the theological defenses presented by Barrett in the book are noteworthy and solid. As you purchase this book, here is a pro reading tip: read the book with your Bible open. That should go without saying as we should read everything in light of what we read in Scripture. However he does a good job at providing some insights into passages of Scripture and thus they should be read alongside his points and references. This book was provided to me free of charge for the purposes of review. However, that did not impact the type of review I gave and the opinions contained in

this post are the result of my own reading of the book.

This is an excellent and comprehensive discussion regarding God's Word for both today's Church and a better understanding of how those of the Reformation read Scriptures. Have your Bible open and be blessed. I will read this again and will be recommending it to everyone. This is an "AWESOME " study.

Very good primer for a needed subject. Goes through historical, Biblical, and systematic theology. I recommend it as a good start to the issues, and why they still matter.

I have read other great books on sola Scriptura, but this book rises to the top because its more exhaustive. Barnett takes a great deal of time to explain the issue from beginning to end, in a comfortable conversational way. The book is not heady, it's practical and realistic.

Superb material and helpful for teaching

Great Book

We are quickly approaching the 500-year anniversary of the event that people often date the Reformation back to Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 thesis to the doors of Wittenberg. As we approach this anniversary, there are certain to be many books and articles written on the importance of and reflections about the Reformation and its impact on our theology today. And rightfully so. A New SeriesOne such books comes to us as the third in a series from Zondervan. The series is called "The 5 Solas Series: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters." I reviewed the two previous volumes in this series here and hereNow, allow me to introduce you to the third in the series written by Systematic Theology and Church History professor, Matthew Barrett "God's Word Alone: The Authority of ScriptureIn this book, Barrett looks at the doctrine of sola Scriptura. But what is sola Scriptura exactly? Barrett says that it means that "only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church" (23). This means, then, that Scripture is our final authority, that it alone is our sufficient authority, and that, as God's inspired Word, it is our inerrant authority.Unfortunately, these are not truths that are embraced, let alone cherished, by all Christians today ... even within so-called-Evangelicalism. Some want to say that the Bible is

authoritative, but not inerrant. Others want to say that it is inerrant, but not sufficient. Still others say that it is all these things, yet in practice they do, believe, and act in ways that subvert their confession of such truths. The Structure Barrett utilizes historical, biblical, and systematic theology in this book in order to help the reader gain a broad, biblical picture of the doctrine of God's Word. In part 1, Barrett travels back in time to show that a shift in authority has taken place since the Reformation — a shift that has massive implications for today. Beginning in the time of the Reformation and passing through the Enlightenment, theological Liberalism, and ending today with postmodernism, this first part is a dense, scholarly, but necessary look at how we've come to where we are today. Part 2 shifts from historical theological to biblical theology by tracing the redemptive-historical context for the doctrine of Scripture in order to show that the triune God has made himself known covenantally, and that His covenantal Word always proves true. The final section of the book, part 3, turns to systematic theology by looking at the topics of inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. This last section is really the heart of the book, but the first 2 sections lay the groundwork in order for the reader to fully understand and appreciate the truths here in part 3.

Conclusion

This book, addressing the topic of God's Word, is as needed today as it was 500 years ago. As Barrett says in the conclusion: "While some hiss at biblical authority, I cherish it. If God did not speak with authority in his written Word, I would be lost in my sins to this day, and so would you. So it is with much confidence that I can say that if the authority of Scripture is abandoned, our faith will be too. It is only a matter of time. To quote Augustine: 'Faith will start tottering if the authority of scripture is undermined'" (374).

What do you believe about God's Word? Does what you say you believe about God's Word square up with how you handle God's Word, or with the other books and authors that you read and listen to their teaching? The reformation is not over. As the Reformers' mantra stated — The church is reformed and always in need of being reformed according to the Word of God. May it be so with us today as well. I would encourage you to pick up a copy of this book and dive into the deep end of the pool in studying the doctrine of the Word of God. It will be a challenge for you. It is not an easy read, nor is it an easy topic. But the challenge will be well worth the reward, for in this book you will get biblical, accurate, and informed teaching on what God's Word says about itself — something that we are all continually in need of.

In accordance with FTC regulations, I would like to thank Zondervan publishers for providing me with a review copy of this book in exchange for a fair and honest review.

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