

Sola Scriptura: Original Intent, Historical Development, and Current Debates

At the Imperial Diet of Worms (1521), Martin Luther courageously affirmed the doctrine of Sola Scriptura. Our purpose in this session is not to treat the doctrine of Sola Scriptura as a doctrinal artifact of a bygone era. Rather, it is to encourage each one of us to embrace the doctrine of Sola Scriptura afresh, if we need to do so. In our secular culture we should take our own stand courageously, just like Martin Luther did, for Christ the Word of God in the flesh based on Holy Scripture, the Word of God written.

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- I. Introduction: The Doctrine of Sola Scriptura
 - A. Martin Luther's Defense of Sola Scriptura at Worms

 - B. Current Debates regarding the Reformation definition of Sola Scriptura

 - C. Comparison of the Sola Scriptura views of the German Martin Luther and those of the Englishman William Whitaker to help resolve the interpretative debate

- II. Historical Background for Luther's Convictions about Sola Scriptura
 - A. Luther believed in the Bible's truthfulness or infallibility.

 - B. Luther believed not only the Bible alone is the final, infallible authority for our salvation, but the Bible is also a sufficient authority: it tells us all we need to know about our salvation [vs. Roman Catholic claims].

- C. Luther believed the Greek and Hebrew originals of Scripture and not the error pocked text of Jerome's Latin Vulgate constitutes the infallible Word of God [vs. Roman Catholic claims].

- D. Luther believed in the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture [vs. the claims of Erasmus, a Roman Catholic].

- III. The Epochal debate between the Anglican William Whitaker and Roman Catholicism's foremost apologist, Robert Bellarmine [also an opponent of Galileo]. Whitaker's *Disputations on Scripture* [1588] constitutes the most significant defense of Sola Scriptura against Roman Catholic claims during the English Reformation. Whitaker highly esteemed by the King James Bible translators
 - A. Both Luther and Whitaker believed in biblical infallibility or biblical inerrancy.

 - B. Both Luther and Whitaker believed not only that the Bible alone is an infallible rule of faith and practice, but that Scripture is also a sufficient rule.

 - C. Both Luther and Whitaker believed that vernacular translations of the Bible were authoritative to the extent they faithfully reflect the Hebrew and Greek Originals inspired by the Holy Spirit.

 - D. Both Luther and Whitaker believed that there is sufficient clarity in Scripture for us to understand salvation truths.

- IV. Our Finding: A General Concordance Exists between the Views of Scripture of Martin Luther and William Whitaker, a second- generation Post-Trent (1545-1563) Reformer. This concordance permits us to enunciate with assurance what Martin Luther's view of Sola Scriptura is on certain key points in current debates.

- V. The challenge and import of upholding the doctrine of Sola Scriptura in today's secular, Gospel starved world.