

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Sola Scriptura - Part 1

July 12, 1998

Deuteronomy 31:9, 12-13; 32:46-47

⁹ *So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel...*¹² *“Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law,”*¹³ *“and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”*

⁴⁶ *and He said to them: “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.”*⁴⁷ *“For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess.”* NKJV

Outline

- **Sola Scriptura**
- Solus Christus
- Sola Gratia
- Sola Fide
- Soli Deo Gloria

Historical Background - The Reformation in a Nutshell

Sadly, modern Christians are absolutely clueless about a significant period of time called the Reformation. If you ask most Evangelical Christians today whether they were Catholic or Protestant, they would know just how to answer the question and say without much thought, Protestant. Although they would know that they weren't Catholic, they would not be able to give a good answer as to what it means to be Protestant. “So, what is it that you are protesting?” you might ask them. The brave might respond, “The Catholic Church.” It would become painfully obvious that these protesting “soldiers” were unaware of why they were in battle and unsure of who the enemy really was.

The term Reformation is the historical name given to a period of time beginning in the sixteenth century where a cry went forth in the western European church for reform. The dominant Catholic Church was corrupt; its courts were corrupt; the church's magisterium had confused its role with the role of the *civil* magistrate. When it comes to reform like this however, it is always messy, but necessary. This was especially true of this Reformation because it encompasses parallel movements in various countries, primarily Switzerland, Germany, England, Scotland, and France. There were faithful works for reform in the region and there was plenty of unfaithful. The cry for reform for some was at times not uniform; some felt the most important

thing to reform was the incumbents holding office in the church; others felt that the officer's agenda should shift from secular matters to spiritual; others felt that it was the vitality that needed polishing to attract those who had left; and still other felt the heart of reform began with theology.

Given our high altitude consideration of the Reformation, we will say that there were four primary movements during the Reformation. Most historians would say that the starting gun of the Reformation was Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg, Germany. The second large body of commotion started in Switzerland by John Calvin in Geneva. The later large movement in Reformation centered not on an individual, but rather a group called the Anabaptists. Lastly, a fourth major movement in the Reformation was the counter attack (called the Counter Reformation) mounted by the Catholic Church in response to the success of the Reformers. These events encompass a period of roughly two and a half centuries during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.

The term Protestant frequently is used to refer to anyone who favored the Reformation. Technically though, this term began in Germany in 1529 by the leadership in response to the Catholic vote at the Second Diet of Speyer which declared their intolerance of the movements toward reformation in Germany. Prior to this the proponents of the Reformation were referred to as Evangelicals.

The Historic Problem of Tradition

The difficulties of applying tradition have been ever present. We as humans tend to enjoy the predictability of our traditions and given the short duration of our lives and the manner in which truth is handed down generationally, traditions have a habit of becoming law. We see this very thing happening in Jesus' day as He rebukes the Pharisees for elevating the traditions of men above or even parallel to the commandments of God. (Mark 7:5-13)

Since the time of the Apostolic Church, there have been those who faithfully attempted to institute a tradition for the faithful handling of the Scriptures. Most likely beginning with Irenaeus in the second century, who developed a formal method for the interpretation of Scripture (now called biblical hermeneutics) to today where we have defined rules called higher and lower textual criticism, these traditions are very useful for ensuring that we come as servants of the Scriptures rather than princes over it.

The Catholic argument was that God had given not only the Scriptures to the church for authoritative instruction, but had also given the authoritative traditions as well as the authoritative magisterium. This position is argued from the Scriptures by drawing from the fact that before the canon had been closed, oral, Apostolic instruction was authoritative and that this pattern of both oral and written authority was something to continue until Christ's return.

A second problematic tradition was the Catholic belief that the Church Magisterium was the body where truth was not only *defended* but also *preserved*. Their belief in Papal descent (lineage of Popes coming through Peter) was the means by which this preservation would be accomplished. This meant that the Scriptures could not be faithfully understood by the laity and

the casual reading and study of the Scriptures was discouraged (and at times forbidden through law). Obviously when the Magisterium becomes corrupt, so too their pronouncements and thus the exact scenario that lead to the cry for reform. At the heart of this cry was a demand for reforming the theology of the Church which the Reformers believed had departed from the Biblical, Apostolic teaching as well as the historic teaching of the faithful church. The theologies in question are the five topics of this series.

A Biblical Defense of Sola Scriptura

This Latin phrase which translated means “Scripture alone” is the starting place for our study because from it emanates our other topics. Before we consider what this means, let’s consider what it does *not* mean.

- It *does not* mean that the Bible is the only place where truth can be found.
- It *does not* mean that the Bible is equally clear to all people.
- It *does not* mean that the instruction of the Church is not helpful and authoritative.

It does mean however, that the Scriptures are our only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice. We are not talking here however about “solo Scriptura” which might be what we would call those who want themselves to be the only teachers (the “just-gimme-me-and-my-Bible” group) and to repudiate all others. We are however saying that the Scriptures are our final authority and that they are infallible. All other authorities, even though equally as valid, are subordinate to the Scriptures and are fallible.

“¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:14-17 NKJV

Central to the question of Sola Scriptura is the question of sufficiency. The Protestant understanding is that the Scriptures are complete and that they are absolutely sufficient for all that we need for instruction in righteousness, faith, and salvation. There is a distinction to be made between formal sufficiency and material sufficiency. The first pertains to whether the Scripture alone (apart from instructors, parents, and church discipline) is sufficient for all training. The second concept states that the message or content of the Scripture is sufficient. The Protestant position is that God has given the offices and authority to the Church as a blessing for her. However in all cases the content of the Scriptures is ultimately authoritative.

Historical Objections

The Protestant Church is a dismal failure due to all of the factious denominations – While this charge is painfully true about the Protestant movement, it is still equally true of the Catholic Church which has not avoided to any measure the divisions and factions with its walls. Where the Catholic Church has maintained a common name yet divided under one roof, the Protestants

have broken into multiple names and multiple roofs. However, it is Christ who will sanctify the Bride and prepare her for the wedding feast. We believe that our victorious Lord will accomplish this sanctification and the Church will one day be unified.

Oral instruction as well as written instruction are equally authoritative in the Scriptures – This comes from 2 Timothy 1:13 (and others) and is motivated by the belief that the pattern of oral and written instruction prior to the canonization of the Scriptures was normative and that the Church is responsible for providing the equally infallible and authoritative oral instruction.

You use circular reasoning by claiming that the Scriptures are the word of God because it claims to be – Guilty as charged. Although this claim does not necessarily come from the Catholic/Protestant debate it is raised frequently when discussing Sola Scriptura. The argument is misguided though because everyone uses circular reasoning when they are defending their ultimate source of authority. When defending ultimate authority you are always forced to borrow from it in order to defend its authority. The primary way we defend the authority of Scriptures is prophetic authority, Apostolic authority and the example of our Lord Jesus.

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Solus Christus - Part 2

July 19, 1998

¹³ *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

Colossians 1:13-18, NKJV

Outline

- Sola Scriptura
- **Solus Christus**
- Sola Gratia
- Sola Fide
- Soli Deo Gloria

Historical Background

Having established the supremacy of the Scriptures as the only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice, it therefore follows that the remaining four principles should flow from the first and be fully revealed in the Scriptures. This becomes the essence of the issue; extra-biblical writings and church tradition were at odds with the accepted Scriptures and the Reformers attempted to return the theology of the church to its foundation.

A Biblical Defense of Solus Christus

The Sacramental Reformation

²³ *Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.²⁴ For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;²⁵ not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—²⁶ He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.²⁷ And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,²⁸ so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. Hebrews 9:23-28, NKJV*

At the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church had formally established that there were seven sacraments—baptism, the eucharist, penance, confirmation, marriage, ordination and extreme unction. The Reformers not only brought the number of sacraments into dispute but also (and primarily) brought the theology of each. The Mass was the center of the liturgical service of the Catholic Church and it was originally spoken only in Latin. Although most of the laity could not speak Latin, this was not the most important of the things needed to be reformed.

The two primary points under dispute were the elements of the Mass (communion) and the crucifixion of Christ. The Reformers argued against the Catholic position that the bread and the wine, although they retained the outward appearance, actually became in substance the flesh and blood of Christ. Even though some of the Reformers disagreed on the details of this issue, it was clear that the idolatry of showing reverence toward the wine and bread was refuted.

Another aspect of the Mass that came under reform was the belief that the Priests were actually breaking the body of Christ each time they administered the Lord's Table. This of course was an extreme heresy to the Reformers because of the theological implications and the clear contradictions of the Scriptures. The Reformers taught that Christ died for the Elect, once for all and after His death ascended to the right hand of the Father where He sits until His return apart from sin for salvation.

Christ as Mediator

⁵ For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,⁷ for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. 1 Timothy 2:5-7, NKJV

Mariology is the body of doctrine surrounding the Catholic position on the deification of Mary the mother of Jesus. Perhaps the first hint of emphasizing Mary came from Irenaeus, who during the second century, contrasted Eve's disobedience with Mary's obedience. The contrast came from Paul's contrast of Adam's disobedience with that of Jesus' obedience. This evaluation although accurate does not justify the correlation between Mary and Eve. It was further believed that this correlation meant that Mary was central to the salvation of the world through the new creation and thus making here co-redemptrix with her Son and mother of the Church. Later in 431 at the Council of Ephesus the term Mother of God (theotokos) was adopted as an official title for Mary. It was later believed by the Church that the extrabiblical writings which describe the Assumption of Mary were authoritative and this doctrine and related doctrine became formal positions of the Church. Even today pressure is being put upon the Pope to formally recognize Mary as co-mediatrix with Christ as the two of them (along with the recognized Saints) are interceding on behalf of the Church with prayers to the Father.

However, we can see why the Reformers objected so strongly to this teaching. Such doctrines, whether or not they are supported by the extra-biblical writings, are in clear contradiction with the writing of the New Testament where Jesus is described as the only Mediator between man and God. Peter himself declares that there is no other name by which a man can be saved other than the name Jesus. (Acts 4:11)

The scriptures also declare that it is Jesus who intercedes on our behalf (Hebrews 7:23-28) and His sacrifice is sufficient to atone or propitiate for the sins of the Church. There is no biblical basis for ascribing such attributes to any other than Christ.

Christ as Priest

¹¹ But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?¹⁵ And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Hebrews 9:11-15, NKJV

For reasons which we will consider more deeply in our study of Sola Gratia, the Catholic Church believed that the church was the dispensary of grace. It was through the church that grace which emanated from Christ was dispensed to the individual. Whether it be saving grace or grace which grants repentance, the church was the mechanism through which such grace was received. It followed then that such grace should be dispensed by no ordinary individual within the church and the priestly order developed into an additional layer of intercession.

The priesthood of the individual believer (1 Peter 2:4-10) was a key doctrine which disputed this intercessory role of the priest. It was taught that every truly regenerate was able to approach the throne of God to declare praises, confess sins, and offer supplications.

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Sola Gratia - Part 3

July 26, 1998

Outline

- Sola Scriptura
- Solus Christus
- **Sola Gratia**
- Sola Fide
- Soli Deo Gloria

Historical Background

We have considered two essential truths for the Christian faith; the supremacy of the Scriptures with regard to faith and practice and the central figure of those Scriptures being Jesus Christ. In this next section we will address another fundamental tenet of Christianity, the utter dependency we have upon the grace of God. That there is even such a thing for us to depend on unfortunately escapes us and for many modern Evangelical Christians, a proper understanding of grace is far from them. With regard to the Reformation however, Sola Gratia was in no way a new concept.

The debate over our dependence upon the grace of God probably had its most significant participants in Augustine and Pelagius in the late fourth century. Augustine was a Bishop in northern Africa in a place called Hippo Regius whose writings are one of the most treasured in Christendom today. He was a prolific writer and his most widely recognized work was his work called "Confessions".

Pelagius was a monk who during the sack of Rome by the Visigoths fled to northern Africa where he encountered Augustine. For years deemed orthodox it wasn't until a number of years later that his heresy became widely known. Pelagius' teaching included a denial of original sin and predestination, and strong support of man's free will and his innate ability to do good. Augustine and Jerome debated Pelagius and in 416 two different councils excommunicated Pelagius.

The point of this background is to show that the debate over the free will of man and our dependence upon the grace of God in no way originated in the Reformation. However, the gains that were secured by Augustine had all but been lost by the sixteenth century when another legendary debate occurred between the theology of John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius. Although Calvin had been dead for many years, Arminius hated the teachings on the sovereignty of God and set out to respond to Calvin's teaching about free will and election. In 1618, 54 years after the death of Calvin and 9 years after the death of Arminius, at the Synod of Dort, a five point response to the five point position of Arminius was adopted and has subsequently been referred to as the five points of Calvinism. But at the heart of this issue is really the old debate against Pelagianism, or even the more moderate position of semi-Pelagianism.

Semi-Pelagianism, although a more recent term, was a variant of the staunch position of Pelagius which many followers adopted years after his death. It still emphasized the free will of man, denied the particular predestination of individuals, and believed that God's grace was central in providing Christ as an atonement for sin, but depended upon the man to exercise his free will to possess salvation. This was largely the position of the Catholic Church but even it had been muddled to the point where the grace of God and our free will work together to bring about our salvation.

A Biblical Defense of Sola Gratia

The Total Depravity of Man

Before we can understand the grace of God, we must understand the situation which makes His grace necessary. In Adam, all of the human race has been included in his fall. Not only did we inherit a nature which is in bondage to sin from Adam, we ourselves were born in sin. Therefore at birth we were enemies of God and lovers of that which was evil.

| Old Testament: | New Testament: |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Kings 8:46 | Matthew 15:19 |
| Job 14:1-4 | Romans 3:10-12 |
| Proverbs 20:9 | Romans 8:7-8 |
| Jeremiah 13:23 | 1 Corinthians 2:13 |
| Jeremiah 17:9 | Ephesians 4:17-24 |

The Essential Grace of God

In the scriptures we see different kinds of grace being deployed. Whether it is God's gracious provision of rain or food or whether it is His grace which makes us sufficient for a task or duty, these are all manifestations of our gracious God. But for this discussion we will be considering the grace of God which brings salvation (Titus 2:11-15).

The reason why the Gospel is such good news is because it resolves that which is such bad news. We are not only born in sin we continue in it each day; if we say that we have not sinned then we deceive only ourselves and we are liars (1 John 1:8). The first thing we must come to understand is the definition of the word grace. Grace is commonly defined as unmerited favor but we must go much further than this. By definition, grace must be antithetical to works. (Romans 11:1-7) Grace is also antithetical to fairness or justice. (Romans 6:20-23) By definition, grace must be completely free from works otherwise grace is no longer grace.

In Romans 5:12-21 we again see the condition of man but we see the conquering grace of God abounding much more than the prevalent sin of man.

Our Righteous God: The Just and The Justifier

The next logical point that might come up for consideration is on what basis can a lawful God deploy this grace? If we are all sinners such that we were born in sin as well as steeped in our own sin, how can a righteous and just God not impose the sanctions of the law upon us? It is plain to see that all of us deserve condemnation and eternal punishment so it is easy to see how a righteous God could pour out His wrath upon sinners. How could a righteous God possibly allow anyone in to heaven? The answer begins in Romans 3:21-26 where we see our righteous God declare that He must be just and the one who justifies. Remember that justification is a legal term which means that one who is guilty is declared no longer guilty.

But again, how can a righteous God be both the giver of a perfect law and be a just God and not convict those who offend? The glorious answer to this can be found in Romans 8:1-8 where we see that God did not set aside the law nor did He diminish our sin. Instead He fulfilled the righteous requirement of His righteous law by making His son to be our sin by imputing our sin to Jesus on the cross (Galatians 3:13).

Our Righteous God: The Glorifier

The grace of God upon which we entirely depend upon God for our eternal security has clearly justified us and continues to sanctify us by conforming us to the image of His Son. But this same grace has also glorified those whom it has saved and this glorification is the adoption as sons. When once we were enemies of God and yet still sinners, God sent His Son to efficaciously secure the salvation of the Elect, the Church. But this grace did not end at justification, rather it went even further and glorified us to the point of adoption as sons with a guaranteed inheritance and the right to call Him Father as does our Elder Brother Jesus. We are taken from a position of being by nature an object of wrath to a position of sonship and an eternal inheritance.

Next week we will examine the proper role of works and the faith by which this grace is imputed.

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Sola Fide - Part 4

August 2, 1998

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Romans 10:1-4 NKJV

Outline

- Sola Scriptura
- Solus Christus
- Sola Gratia
- **Sola Fide**
- Soli Deo Gloria

Historical Background

Perhaps no other doctrine caused as much turmoil during the Reformation as Sola Fide. It was the very doctrine that prompted Martin Luther in his 95 theses to challenge the Catholic position of indulgences. He had heard a sermon preached by a Catholic clergy which appalled him by its crude theology and materialism. Upon returning home, he drafted the theses and posted them October 31, 1517 on the church door at Wittenberg. Subsequently, the Catholic Church condemned Luther's writing and wrote an order to have his works burned. In response, some followers of Luther burned the order. Luther became a prolific writer and composed a number of works that refuted not only indulgences but established the reformational position of Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide.

Later in 1520, a more forceful edict (called a bull) was ordered that would have opened Luther to the possibility of bodily harm and no civil protection. Before imposing the bull, in 1521 Charles V gave Luther the opportunity to repent of his theology and of course he did not. The bull was then enforced and fearing his harm, Luther's followers arranged for his kidnapping and he was hidden in the castle at Wartburg where Luther took the opportunity to begin translating the New Testament into simple German.

The Catholic position in opposition to Luther's Sola Fide was that the grace of God, by His good pleasure was poured into us. As this pouring or infusing occurred, it made us righteous and thus able to perform good works. Our free will cooperating with the grace then performed the works and together made us fit for salvation. It was taught that only by our will cooperating with grace and producing good works was the sinner able to merit salvation. Therefore, grace was infused and we cooperate with it to produce good works that belong to us. Those good works improve with time until they are such that we have pleased God enough to grant us salvation. Justification to the Catholic mind was then a process, not an event by declaration. Perhaps nowhere can the

Roman Church's rebellion against this doctrine be found any stronger than in the 1563 Council of Trent canons.

We have already seen the authority of scripture, the lone Priestly role of Christ as Mediator and Redeemer. We have also seen that the way of salvation exists only because of the inestimable grace of God. Salvation would not exist had God in His mercy not provided a means for atonement and propitiation of His wrath. In evaluating *Sola Fide*, we shall see that the righteousness that the justified sinner stands in is not the works which by performing he has merited grace. Rather we will see that the only efficacious righteousness that will save us is being *clothed* with the righteousness of another—the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.

A Biblical Defense of Sola Fide

God's Provision of Righteousness

Even from the first pages of the Scriptures we see hints of the covenant of redemption that God was revealing. In Genesis 3:21 we see an incredible provision of our Lord for the fallen Adam and Eve. Having come to see their shame, they sewed together fig leaves to attempt to hide their shame. God however, provided a durable covering of skin through the sacrifice of an animal. This early picture of the Gospel reveals God's intent of providing a righteousness that is external or alien to the person in which they will be clothed.

In Isaiah 61:10-11 we again see that this righteousness is not caused by grace in me. Rather it is likened as clothing or a robe which the Lord puts around us and with which He covers us.

In Jeremiah 33:14-16 we see that our righteousness does not belong to us, nor is it of us in any way as we see that our righteousness belongs to and comes from the Lord of Righteousness Himself.

God Imputes (Not Infuses) that Righteousness and Not Our Sins

Paul declares in Romans 4:1-12 that our righteousness comes through God in His mercy, not imputing our sins to us but rather imputing His righteousness. This means that we were *by the nature* inherited from Adam objects of wrath. But so that the purposes of God in election might stand, some received mercy not of their own righteousness but out of His great love

We Receive the Imputation By Faith

Continuing in Romans 4:13-24 Paul shows how this righteousness is given through faith to all who are of the faith of our father Abraham.

In Philippians 3:1-11 Paul repudiates his works as being the basis of his salvation. Although his works may have been righteous, they were rubbish when considered as the basis for salvation. Paul does not crave his own righteousness for he knows that our own cannot save but he craves "the righteousness which is from God by faith" apart from works or any other thing at all which is to say, *sola fide*.

James does not teach a faith which is the opposite of Paul (James 2:14-26) but rather the same faith with a different emphasis. James teaches that this faith produces good works. This is not the same as the Catholic teaching which declares that faith comes by works. The distinction here can best be summarized by the notion that the Scripture declares that we are saved by grace through a faith *that* works rather than faith *and* works. Or another way to think of Sola Fide is that we are saved by grace through faith *alone* but not through a faith that *is alone*. It is faith alone that is the basis for our salvation, but our salvation is made clearly evident by our works. Compare also 2 Peter 1:1-11.

This Faith is a Gift

Ephesians 2:1-10 declares that the basis of our salvation is the grace of God in the perfect fulfillment of the law in His Son. This perfect righteousness, which is the righteousness from God, is imputed to us through faith. Knowing that the heart is deceitfully wicked, God knew that some might be tempted to boast even in this faith. Therefore, God, protecting grace, provided the faith necessary for salvation as a gift so that even the faith could not be the object of boasting. Our boasting is then in the Lord alone.

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Soli Deo Gloria - Part 5

August 16, 1998

1 Chronicles 16:7-36

Outline

- Sola Scriptura
- Solus Christus
- Sola Gratia
- Sola Fide
- **Soli Deo Gloria**

Review and Introduction

We come to this last of the five Solas because truly the other four are summed into the fifth. It is the Scriptures alone that are our only ultimate and infallible source of authority. This is so because God in His mercy and faithfulness has seen fit to preserve the Scriptures down through the centuries. The proper roles of Church tradition or the teachings of the officers within the church are the same; all in submission to the ultimate authority of the Scriptures. God is therefore glorified alone.

It is the incarnate second person of the Trinity to which the Prophets and Scriptures point. It is the ministry of Jesus Christ sent by the Father to accomplish His purposes in His covenant of Redemption. There is no other Mediator nor Redeemer other than the one provided by the Father Himself to fulfill the righteous requirements of His law. God is therefore glorified alone.

It is only by His inestimable grace that we may stand before Him. Through the good pleasure of His mercy, He graciously imputed to us the righteousness of His son and imputed to His Son our sin where it was judged upon the cross. God is therefore glorified alone.

The grace of God has its affect upon us by faith alone. We do not merit the grace (otherwise grace would not be grace) nor is this grace infused in us in order to make us righteous in ourselves. Instead, the grace of God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us and we believe this by faith alone. We have no other basis upon which to rely than the accomplishments of Christ, the imputation of the work to us and the faith given to us so that we may believe Him and these things. God is therefore glorified alone.

Historical Background

There were many battles during the Reformation where this principle was the central issue. The Reformers took on the Catholic Church with regard to her glorification of idols and images. They also opposed the glorification of the office of the Pope and the other church officers. Another dispute was the glorification of Mary who was elevated to be above Christ in many ways and

parallel to Him in the rest. Soli Deo Gloria was the overarching principle of the Reformation and related to every battle of protest by the Reformers.

Defining Glory

Over the centuries and especially in our days of modernity, we are very accustomed to the word glory but if you were to ask a number of Christians to define glory you would get probably three times as many definitions. We must remember that when we consider the glory of God, we use both a noun term and a verb term. The noun glory is similar to honor but is the outward manifestation of all of the attributes of God. As His goodness or power or righteousness, or whatever attribute it may be, is displayed in the universe, God's glory is revealed. All of His attributes shine forth His glory or honor. They declare His uniqueness in all ways. Although we were made by Him in His image, we are infinitely not Him.

The second part of glory is the verb to glorify. This is the declaration of high praise, honor, or worship to God. It is an acknowledgement of who God is and who we are. All that God does manifests His honor to the universe.

A Biblical Defense of Soli Deo Gloria

Psalm 148:13;
Romans 16:27;
1 Timothy 1:16;
Jude 25;
Revelation 15:4

The Scriptures declare that God is a jealous God and requires that nothing else be worshipped in His place. Whether we substitute the church or ourselves, any substitution of the ascribing of greatness and declaring glory is idolatry.

Sinners Glorifying God?

There are many ways that the Scriptures tell us to glorify God:

All of the nations will glorify Him; *Psalm 86:9-10*.

We are to glorify Him through belief as did Abraham; *Romans 4:19-22*.

We are to glorify God with our bodies through sexual purity whether single or married; *1 Corinthians 6:20*.

We are to clothe ourselves with good works so that when the ungodly bring false accusations against us, God will be glorified; *1 Peter 2:12*.

Because God has predestined us to salvation by grace through faith in Christ, God is glorified; *Ephesians 1:11-12*.

God declares His glorious wisdom by means of the Church; *Ephesians 3:8-13*

One of the central issues however, during the Reformation was the improper exultation of the officers in the Church. Even beginning during the third century, there began to develop the mindset that the highest form of worship toward God could only be offered by those in full time ministry. The service of God was the only “calling” and all other vocations were mundane and inferior. This is not to say that they believed work to be unimportant; rather they all believed that ordinary working was necessary, but demeaning

By the time of the Reformation, the Reformers saw this principle fully blossomed in the self aggrandizing worship of the saints and officers in the church. The purest form of worship, the highest of all callings, or the vocation which alone glorifies God was deemed by the church to be those offices which performed the “work of God”.

The Protestant Work Ethic

At the heart of this debate were the words “calling” and “talent”. The Reformers began to use the term calling to be any vocation for which God had equipped someone to perform. They believed that whatever work God had given us to do, if done faithfully would be equally glorifying of Him as other faithful work. In *1 Corinthians 10:31* Paul teaches that whatever it is that we do whether mundane or extraordinary, all should be done by faith to the glory of God. They also used the term talent to be that given by God for the purpose of accomplishing work.

The Reformers made no distinction between the spiritual or temporal; sacred or secular. They believed that God had created us to be workers or producers and that whether you were in the pulpit, orchard, or kitchen all that we do when done by faith would bring glory to God. *Isaiah 60:21*.

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