

SOLI DEO GLORIA

After Darkness, Light:

Reformation Doctrines that Lit the World Aflame (No. 5)

Treasuring Christ Church – Pastor Boyd Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Today is the Sunday that Protestant Christians around the world celebrate as Reformation Sunday. It's the Sunday closest to October 31st—the day that Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the church door, which became the spark that lit the Reformation. This year is particularly special because it is the 500th anniversary of that event in 1517.

As a tribute to our heritage and as a way of understanding the gospel better, we've taken the month of October to understand the core beliefs of the Reformers. So, for us, this is not only Reformation Sunday, but also the final Sunday of our five-part series on the core beliefs of the Reformers, which we call the five *solas*.

Our series has taken us to the theological mountain peaks of God's word. In the last several weeks, we've studied together from Scripture the doctrines of inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility, the sufficiency and authority of Scripture, the righteousness and justice of God, justification, imputation, propitiation, the nature of faith, free will, the depravity of man, union with Christ, salvation, ransom, redemption, election, the nature of grace, substitutionary atonement, penal sacrifice, and the mediation and the exclusive saving work of Christ. These are the truths of God's word that we stake our lives on. They are foundational to what we believe as Christians. The five *solas* really are a way of summarizing the important truths of the gospel.

We've learned that justification before God is by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone* as taught with the final authority of *Scripture alone*. Now we add to that: that justification before God is to the glory of God alone. This *sola* is known as *soli Deo gloria*—to the glory of God alone. This is the aim of all that God does in saving us. The ultimate aim of our salvation is to glorify *God*, even as *we* benefit by being saved by him.

Romans 11:33-36

Look at what Paul says at the end of 11 chapters of doctrine about salvation in Romans 11:33-36. For 11 chapters, Paul has explained the gospel in detail: He has explained that no one is righteous before God and that we are all guilty because of our sin. He has shown that God's plan of salvation has always been an act of God's grace to man and that faith is the only way of receiving salvation. He has argued that just as sin came by one man, Adam, the free gift of life has come by one man, Christ Jesus. He has rejoiced that everyone found in Christ can never be separated from his love and that every one of those who God predestined for eternal life will one day be glorified.

Then he demonstrated that God has remained true to his word—that despite Israel's rejection of their Messiah, God's word hasn't failed and their election will result in their restoration when the full number of Gentiles have come to salvation.

As Paul reflected on the whole scope of salvation—all that God has and will accomplish because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—he erupted in this hymn of praise:

Romans 11:33–36: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

Even as Paul explained the ways of God in saving man, he recognized that no one came plumb the depths of God's plans. God's ways are higher than ours. His wisdom far surpasses our own. His knowledge is beyond our understanding. For all the purposes that we can see in God's salvation of us, he is doing 10,000 times 10,000 times more that we cannot see.

But the banner over all of God's sovereign plans to save man is this: "From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." Salvation is from God. Salvation is through God. Salvation is to God. All of it for his glory.

That's the best summary of what we call the five *solas*. What Paul is saying is that salvation is God-centered. The salvation of man is for the glory of God. The reason that must be true is that God is the most God-centered person in the universe. He cherishes nothing more than himself. So, uppermost in God's purposes of saving man is God's own glorification of himself.

That's what we mean by *solī Deo gloria*—justification before God is to the glory of God alone. This is the summary *sola*. The aim of all the other *solas* is "to the glory of God alone." If you rightly understand *sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *solus Christus*, then *solī Deo gloria* must be your conclusion.

So, as a way of concluding our series, I want to draw out how God is glorified in each of the other four *solas*.

I. THE GLORY OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE ALONE

How is God glorified in the truth that Scripture alone is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church?

First, the inerrancy of Scripture means that God can be trusted.

The Scriptures are "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16) and he cannot lie (Numbers 23:19). He will not lie to you. You can believe that everything he says is true and that you will not be led astray.

So you don't have to wonder whether you have believed in the "right God." You have, if you have believed in the God of the Bible.

You don't have to wonder what will happen to you after you die. You can know for sure, if you have read about it in the Bible.

You don't have to wonder what God is like. You can know for sure, if you have read what he's said about himself in the Bible.

You don't have to wonder what your eternal destiny will be. You can know for sure, if you've read of the path to life and the path to death in the Bible.

The inerrancy of Scripture magnifies the trustworthiness of God.

Second, the sufficiency of Scripture means that God has provided what you need for salvation and the life of faith.

Scripture provides knowledge necessary to be saved.

Romans 10:17: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

He hasn't hidden the way to heaven. It is written down into a book. By reading or hearing God's words, the way of salvation is made known.

Scripture also provides knowledge necessary for spiritual health.

Matthew 4:4: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

His word is as bread to you. It will feed your soul. And this bread of the word is enough for you. He has held nothing back that you need. Nothing is lacking in what he has provided. The sufficiency of Scripture magnifies God as the feeder of our souls.

Third, the authority of Scripture means that God is wise.

Man has his opinions about the nature of spiritual things, but God is authoritative. So we must depend on God's wisdom, not man's wisdom for salvation and the life of faith. Paul compares man's wisdom and God's wisdom in:

1 Corinthians 1:18–20: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

For those who think God's truths are foolish, Paul mocks:

1 Corinthians 1:25: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

The source of spiritual truth comes from God and no one else. So God is magnified above popes, councils, priests, scribes, and anyone else who speaks on their own authority because God's word alone is our final authority.

II. THE GLORY OF GOD IN FAITH ALONE

How is God glorified in the truth that justification before God is through faith alone, apart from any human works whatsoever?

First, *sola fide* magnifies his righteousness.

God requires that we have right standing before him (Matt. 5:48: “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”.) His righteousness is preserved in that he will not allow the unrighteous to come before him. He will not minimize sin

by ignoring that we have dishonored him and disobeyed his law. Rather, his glory is upheld in that he justly punishes sin and requires righteousness. He did this, as we learned, by punishing Jesus and crediting Jesus’ righteousness to our bankrupt account:

2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Second, *sola fide* magnifies him as the justifier.

Recall that justification means that God declares a believer righteous—in perfect standing with God. God alone is the one who does this. He alone is the one with the authority and compassion to credit Jesus’ righteousness to our account.

Paul explains how God is glorified in granting us justification in:

Romans 3:23–28: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

Our boasting of salvation is over because God is the one who is the justifier. That means we cannot boast in reason, because we cannot reason our way to God. We cannot boast in our works, because we cannot work our way to God. We cannot boast in our status, because we cannot ascend to a high enough reputation to be esteemed by God. We cannot boast in our heredity or race, because we do not come to God by bloodlines.

We are receivers of salvation, not earners of salvation.

Third, *sola fide* magnifies God the Son because of his righteousness.

Christ’s perfect life is the basis of our justification. That is, our faith is not the basis of our right standing with God. Christ’s righteousness is the basis of our right standing with God, which we receive through faith. Because he is righteous, we are righteous in our union with him.

Romans 5:17: "Those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ."

Since it is with his righteousness that we are declared right with God, he alone gets the glory.

III. THE GLORY OF GOD IN GRACE ALONE

How is God glorified in the truth that justification before God is by grace alone, such that salvation is wholly of God and even faith is his gift?

First, *sola gratia* magnifies him as generous.

His grace to us is a lavish grace. His favor to us is beyond imagining.

Romans 5:7–8: "One will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

He relates to us not out of our merit but out of his mercy. And what does he provide for us in salvation? Everything we need for salvation, including faith. He doesn't meet us halfway, he carries us all the way to himself.

Second, *sola gratia* magnifies his power.

His grace to us is a powerful grace. The glory of his powerful grace is seen in our transformation. Only God has original creative power. He makes us new creations (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Bible says that we were dead spiritually. Yet, he raised us from the dead and gave us new life.

Ephesians 2:5: "[He] made us alive together with Christ. . .and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

The Bible says that we were disobedient. Yet, he turned us around and set us to follow after him. Paul says along with every believer in Romans 7:22: "I delight in the law of God, in my inner being. . ." He echoes the psalmist in Psalm 1: "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." God's change of us is so radical that what was previously a burden has become our delight; what we previously hated has become our love.

The glory of his powerful grace is also seen in what he defeated in order to rescue us. He defeated the foe that no man could defeat—the foe of death.

1 Corinthians 15:54–57: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Though death remains for a season, it is a bee without a stinger. The sting of death is gone because our death is no longer the occasion of our condemnation. Death is no longer the door to hell, but the gate to heaven for the believer. Our sin has been paid for.

He also defeated the foe of Satan by disarming him.

Colossians 2:15: "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

Though Satan can still tempt and blind, he is a disarmed foe in that he cannot successfully accuse God's people because the one thing that can damn eternally—unforgiven sin— has been taken out of his hand. In Christ, all sins are forgiven and Satan has nothing he can accuse us with that has not been forgiven. For Christians, he is a foe without a mortal weapon whose fate is sealed.

Third, *sola gratia* magnifies his sovereign judgment.

Because we didn't have the power within ourselves to choose him, he chose us. The initiative to save us was his alone. He didn't choose us because we were more worthy than others, but rather,

"God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). If God has saved you, it is because you are the foolish of the world, you are the weak of the world, you are the low and despised of the world. And so in saving you, only he gets the glory.

Fourth, *sola gratia* magnifies him as irresistibly attractive.

God could have wiped out Satan long ago, but he chose to leave Satan here, even though he torments and tempts God's people and blinds unbelievers. Why is Satan still here? One reason is surely this: Had God removed Satan, he would have proved that he was stronger than Satan, but not more desirable.

But in leaving Satan, God is magnified every time a sinner turns his back on Satan and embraces Christ as irresistibly attractive. Every soul that counts Christ as his treasure proves that God is more desirable and more worthy of glory than the fallen angel.

IV. THE GLORY OF GOD IN CHRIST ALONE

How is God glorified in the truth that justification before God is in Christ alone as our only sacrifice, mediator, and savior? We could say much, but perhaps we can summarize simply with this: *solus Christus* magnifies God because salvation is solely his work. He sent his Son to come to save the unrighteous. The Son of God came willingly and gave himself up for us all. The God-man died on the cross on our behalf, as our sacrifice, paying our penalty, fully satisfying the wrath of God, and our only Savior. And the Son of God's perfect life is the basis of our right standing with God. He accomplished it all, so he gets all the glory. Just as Paul wrote in Romans 11:36: "From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

CONCLUSION

So there are the five *solas*:

Justification before God is by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in Christ *alone* as taught with the final authority of Scripture *alone* to the glory of God *alone*. These truths are the mountain peaks of our faith. And since God's aim in all that he does is to glorify God, our aim, because we have been saved by him, must be to glorify God in all that we do.

May we be a people that can say with David in

Psalm 34:1–3: "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!"