

## The Five Solas of the Reformation

November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### Ideas

Common experience after traveling overseas on a mission trip of vacation if you get away from the touristy areas is to come back home with a clear appreciation for what you have taken for granted as part of life. Clean water, indoor plumbing, traffic signs that people actually follow. Those things were there all along but because you grew up with them, you don't appreciate how unique they are.

If you have grown up in evangelical Christianity, you may not be aware of that the theological water you drink was hard fought.

You have access to a Bible that you are encouraged to read and understand

You participate in worship rather than merely watch

You can have assurance that you will be in heaven with Christ one day

These themes have always been taught in the Bible but they were obscured for a season of church history leading up to the time we call the Protestant Reformation.

Protestant for "protest" and reformation because the goal was reform not creating a separate branch of Christianity.

A key event of the Reformation occurred 500 years ago this past October 31<sup>st</sup> so I want to pause our Matthew series and look at the Biblical foundations of the Protestant Reformation.

We will consider what are known as the "5 Solas" of the reformation.

"sola" is Latin for "alone"

Diverse streams of thought, internal debates, and different emphases, but these core principles were universally acknowledged by those seeking to reform the church.

The truths affirmed in the five solas form the framework for evangelical Christians today. As we affirm them we are protected from many errors that can impact Christian life and the church. We'll circle back to this at the end as we consider the current implications of the reformation.

As we study the Reformation, we must remember that the story is not about the Reformers. If we make it about them, we violate the very convictions for which they fought.

There is only one true, flawless hero in history – the living God.

1. **Scripture** alone is the highest and final authority
  - a. Not a decree from the church, another book, or the emperor or king.
    - i. If you say, "well, yeah, that's obvious" – that's because you're a product of the Reformation and you don't realize it!
  - b. **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**
    - i. Looks to a future period when the people will want a king over them.
    - ii. God places limits on what the king should not do:
      1. Multiply horses (military strength and wealth)

2. Multiply wives
  3. DA Carson – Prohibitions related to power, false security, desire for social approval through compromised networking, the pursuit of wealth—very much among the false gods still cherished and worshiped today.
- iii. But God gives the king a task that he should do. Write down his own copy of the law of God. May refer to the book of Deuteronomy or a portion of it or the Bible to this point. This was not to be merely set on a shelf but it was to be read all the days of his life.
  - iv. Why this command? He was to know that there was an authority over Him. The authority belongs to God. God has authority because He is the creator and owner of everything. And God communicates to us through the Bible.
- c. Joshua is to meditate on God’s law day and night, carefully doing everything commanded in it. (Joshua 1:7-8). Likewise Psalm 1:2 says the righteous man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.
- i. This is the expectation throughout scripture and the high view held by God’s people.
  - ii. That began to change in the period before the reformation. It wasn’t exactly that the church had a low view of scripture. But they viewed it as something that couldn’t be handled by common people. They would distort it. It needed to be interpreted by the church leadership. It was believed that the common people were incapable of accurately understanding it so it was kept out of their hands and kept out of their languages. It was only available in Latin, a language not spoken by any of the common people any more, only the educated church elites.
- d. For the reformers, the goal was not to get the Bible in the hands of the king, but into the hands of the commoner.
- i. In about 1380 John Wyckliffe in England began to see the problems with this. He was serving in Oxford at a prestigious post at the university when he began to teach the Bible, not the pope, was the supreme source of spiritual authority (Reeves). He was effectively exiled to a small English village where he continued to write. He translated the Bible in English so the people could read it. The language was choppy, it was translated from Latin rather than going back to the original Hebrew and Greek, and it needed to be hand copied but it was something. He died a few years after completing his translation. After his death he was condemned as a heretic for these actions and his bones were dug up and burned. But the Bible remained and groups began to gather and read the Bible (really scraps of the Bible because paper was still expensive and the printing press was still not in use).
  - ii. 140 years later in the 1520’s Martin Luther used part of his time in hiding to translate the Greek New Testament into German. His translation became so prolifically read it transformed the German language.
  - iii. At about the same time as Luther, William Tyndale produced a much improved copy of the New Testament in English. Where Wyckliffe’s copy relied on the Latin version, Tyndale went back to the Greek and produced a much more readable and accurate translation. By now the printing press had taken off so it could be printed rather than hand copied and mass distributed.

1. Tyndale famously said to one scholar who disagreed with him, "I will cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of Scripture than you!"
- e. The renewed emphasis on the clarity of the gospel all rest upon this reality – the Word is the authority and people could read it for themselves.
- f. Once the scripture was in the hands of the people in a language they could understand, the reformation could not be stamped out.
  - i. Ulrich Zwingli discovered this truth in Switzerland as a contemporary of Luther. Already a priest, he had never read the Bible himself. But he found a copy of it in Greek and devoured it. He ended up memorizing the entire New Testament in Greek (think about that, Awana kids!). Zwingli became convinced that the people needed to hear the Word of God simply explained to them. He believed he could preach the Word to all because it could be understood by all, allowed him to proceed with patience in transforming the church. He could teach methodically, clearly through scripture and then people would see the need for change rather than for it to be imposed from above.
- g. Not the only authority – there are other legitimate authorities in life – parents, employers, elders in a local church – but they are all fallible and limited authorities.
2. We are saved by ***grace*** alone through ***faith*** alone in ***Christ*** alone.
  - a. Grace alone
    - i. So many of our hymns and songs extol God's grace
      1. "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!"
      2. "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt."
      3. "Wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all my sin; how shall my tongue describe it, where shall its praise begin?"
    - ii. We define grace as God's unmerited kindness and favor
    - iii. The church at the time did teach that Christians are saved by grace. That wasn't the sticking point. It was the word "alone." They believed we needed to cooperate with God's grace.
    - iv. **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.
      1. Ephesians 1 in powerful language shows that God has set us love upon us and adopted us as sons and daughter "to the praise and glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (v. 6) and this was according to the "riches of His grace" (v. 7).
      2. Then after recounting that we were once spiritually dead in their sins, we have been made alive by grace (v. 5, 8).
        - a. We were under condemnation as guilty of sin and deserving of God's wrath - 2:3 – were by nature children of wrath.
        - b. We were under the yoke of three masters
          - i. The world – 2:2 – walked according to the course of this world

- ii. The flesh – 2:3 – lived in the lusts of our flesh
      - iii. The Devil – 2:2 – according to the prince of the power of the air
    - c. As we've talked about in the gospel of Matthew, this is controversial. People want to think we're basically good and just need education, poverty reform, better laws (as good as those things can be), but the Bible teaches that those things can't touch the heart. And our hearts are more than sick, they're dead.
  - 3. But God's grace makes us alive with Christ (v. 5)
- v. **Romans 3:24** being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;
- b. So where does faith come in?
- i. "Christ's accomplishment of redemption – both in paying for sin and providing righteousness – occurred two thousand years ago, apart from any human influence. His work was objective, external to you and me. Therefore, the question that must be answered is, how can the objective work of Christ be applied to me personally?" *Bible Doctrine*, pg 618
  - ii. The answer of the church prior to the reformation: the church through her ordinances is the channel of grace.
    - 1. (adapted from Michael Reeves) - The clergy of the church were the ones with the authority to turn on the taps of grace. Those taps were the seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Mass, penance, marriage, ordination, and last rights. Like seven arteries of the Body of Christ, through which the lifeblood of God's grace was pumped.
      - a. Mechanistic, the illiterate masses were considered as incapable of expressing explicit faith in Christ, so these mechanisms were used and considered efficacious even if not understood by the people.
    - 2. The people would only partake of the bread of communion and that only once per year but they would see the Mass performed and it was thought that that action conferred grace somehow upon the person, even if it was all being said in Latin. In fact, that's where the phrase "hocus pocus" comes from as a standard word for magic – the Latin phrasing used during mass sounded like hocus pocus.
  - iii. As the reformers went back to scripture they saw that the means of connecting people to God's grace was faith alone.
  - iv. Romans
    - 1. **Romans 3:22** *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe
    - 2. **Romans 3:25** - propitiation in His blood through faith.
    - 3. **Romans 3:26** and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
    - 4. **Romans 3:28** For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

5. **Romans 5:1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
6. **Romans 9:30** That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;
7. **Romans 10:6** But the righteousness based on faith
8. **Galatians 3:22** But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.
9. **Galatians 3:24, 26** <sup>24</sup> Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. . . <sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
10. Jesus to the thief on the cross – “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).
11. Matthew 9:5-6 – Jesus has the authority to forgive as God.
12. Luke 18:9-14 – Pharisee and the tax collector - **Luke 18:13-14** "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

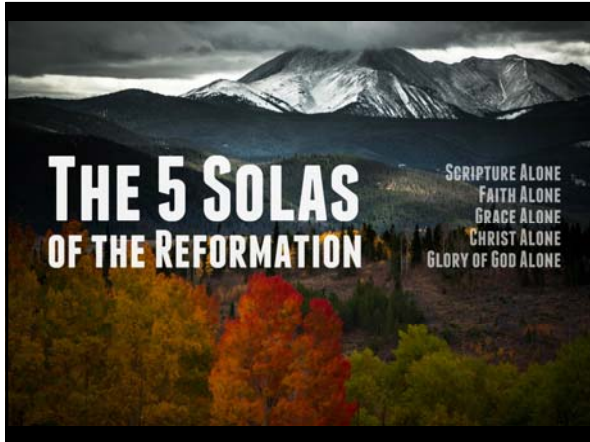
c. Christ is the only mediator between God and man

- i. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.
- ii. "I must listen to the gospel. It tells me not what I must do, but what Jesus Christ the Son of God has done for me." - Martin Luther
- iii. "Christ stepped in, took the punishment upon Himself and bore the judgment due to sinners. With His own blood He expiated the sins which made them enemies of God and thereby satisfied Him...**we look to Christ alone for divine favour and fatherly love!** ...Hence Christ is called “King of peace” (Is. 9:6) and “our peace” (Eph 2:14) because He quiets all agitations of conscience. – John Calvin

3. God alone is worthy of worship and **glory**.

- a. Because salvation is a work of God that we respond to in faith, there is nothing we can boast in about ourselves.
  - i. **Romans 4:1-3** What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."
- b. **Isaiah 43:7** Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."
- c. Sola Scriptura as the foundation to this great building,

- i. Not the church tradition or the authority of the pope or leadership or on the other hand dreams or modern visions. Rather than adding and strengthening the foundation these inevitably only deteriorate it.
  - ii. Built on this foundation are three pillars: sola fide, sola gratia, sola Christos – not good works, church attendance, baptism, marriage, last rites, treasury of merit of the saints –
  - iii. With this foundation and pillars in place, the roof over it all is soli deo Gloria – glory to God alone
4. The continued relevance of the 5 Solas
- a. Scripture is our highest authority, not our emotions or personal experience.
    - i. Instead of examining experience and emotion by the lens of scripture we examine scripture through our emotions and experience, if it is examined at all.
    - ii. Satire article in the Babylon Bee on “sola feels”
      - 1. “Quite simply, ‘Sola Feels’ means that all spiritual truths only become true once they’re filtered through and accepted by our feels—all the feels,” popular author and speaker Jane Hansen told reporters after the meeting. “Thus, things that make us feel bad, those are wrong. The things that give us all the happy feels, those are true, right, and good.” “At least, that’s how we feel at the moment, I feel,” she noted.
    - iii. New issues today but same principles
      - 1. Same-sex marriage, gender identity, value of life at the most vulnerable stages (beginning and end)
  - b. Salvation is in Christ alone, not simply any sincere path a person follows.
    - i. The battle during the reformation was to focus the attention on Christ’s finished work, not the additional works required by people. That battle still continues as we are always tempted to think we need to contribute to our salvation in some way.
    - ii. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.
    - iii. The opposition today though would come from a culture that interprets this as incredibly narrow minded. How can you say there is “one way!?”



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Deuteronomy 17:14-20



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