

## “The Five Solas of the Reformation”

Eric Reebals, Ike Reeder, Max Bunn, Chad Escue, Greg Norfleet

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The first sola that we'll be looking at is Sola Scriptura which means alone Scripture. So, the Scripture alone is our only authoritative rule of faith in life. The Scripture alone is the standard. Let's look at a few verses. Psalm 119:18 says *[18] Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.* Psalm 138:2 says *[2] I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.* II Timothy 3:14-17 says *[14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

The Westminster Confession says “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Paul says in II Timothy 2:15, *[15] Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* God's word is meant to be read, studied, heard, spoken, meditated on, memorized and applied. You may say to yourself, ‘Why is it so important to us?’

God's Word also tells us that God's Word keeps us pure. It says it's our delight. It gives us strength. It gives us answers to life's questions. It gives us hope. It guides us in the way of salvation. It keeps us from evil. It is our guide in life. It gives us life. It is truth. It leads us to rejoice. It gives us understanding. It delivers us. It causes us to sing. It brings peace. It is the Good News. It sets prisoners like us free. It exhorts, teaches reproof, corrects and trains in righteousness. It is God breathed. It causes us to have God's success and prosperity. It brings faith. It sustains our life. It is living and active and cuts away that which is bad in our lives. It defends us. It endures forever. It is exalted above all things. It makes us more like Christ. It is God's Word. So why are we not in God's Word more? We need to be in God's Word every day that it might come alive in our lives for it is the book of life. Amen.

As Sola Scriptura lays the foundation of truth for the Reformation, Sola Gratia is the first triumphant statement on salvation from God's Word articulated by the reformers. It is from Scripture alone that we learn the doctrine of God's grace alone. Grace is the unmerited favor of God poured out on those who not only do not deserve it, but in fact deserve death in its place. The reformers recognized that the act of faith – authentic, holistic belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior – can only occur if the spirit of man has been awakened and enlivened first by the Holy Spirit. Thus, one of the most essential beliefs of reformed theology is that grace precedes faith, not that grace is given to us because of our faith.

What does this teach us about grace? Most of us are happy thinking that we receive the favor of God in an unmerited fashion. Grace is indeed the most fundamental component of salvation. It even alone, could tell the story of salvation that has been bought with a cost – the birth, the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The next four solas will continue to unpack how a righteous God is able to lavish upon a sinful people the free gift and the glory of grace. But the reformers recognized something else that is so important for us today. Grace is not a gift given to us because we say a prayer of faith, of repentance, and demonstrate that faith. Not at all. Grace is so much more than that. Grace comes to us even before we have decided to repent of our sins, to turn and to follow Jesus. In fact, without grace, we would not even be able to do that.

A proper definition and understanding of the position of grace and the order of salvation reminds us of this one simple fact – we do nothing to earn our salvation. It is the unmerited work of God that brings regeneration, awakening our spirit within us so that we might hear the truth of God's Word and be brought to saving faith and turn to our Father in heaven. This is what Paul outlines and that great passage on grace in Ephesians 2:4-9. After clearly laying out the we are dead in our trespasses and sins, both legally and spiritually before God, Paul brings out what my father said were the two greatest words in the Bible, 'but God.'

*[4] **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— [6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:4-9).*

As we finish up this brief study of grace, let's outline what Paul has done. First, we are dead in trespasses and sins. Second, this makes us irrevocably apart from God left to our own devices. Third, God is rich in mercy but God rich in His mercy takes us from death to life and makes us alive in Him. Why does He do so? It is because fourthly, of the great love that He has for us and as Paul will later say that he wants to show the surpassing riches of His grace, for it is by grace you are saved through faith, and even that the faith is not of yourselves, so that none of us can boast.

So, as we ponder the glory of grace alone, let us remember that we bring nothing but sin to the table in our pre-Christian state. But God, rich in mercy, has lavished His love upon us. We have no boast, but Christ. Our thanksgiving is in Him and in the spread of grace from person to person to person as the Kingdom grows. I will close this section with II Corinthians 4:15-17 which says *[15] For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. [16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.*

Let us take a moment silently, as we will shortly be approaching the table and spend some time in quiet contemplation and personal prayer considering the astonishing weight of glory we carry with us in thanksgiving to our God. Pray with me now; "Father, as we come before You in a time of worship and in approaching the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, knowing that left to ourselves, we are not only unworthy for being in Your presence, God, but that apart from You, we would be actively against You. It is your grace, Father, that quickens our spirit. It is Your grace that allows us to even begin to know who You are and what You have done for us by that grace. Thank You, Father, for sending Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who has won the victory on the cross and delivered the promised riches of that grace to us, even as we anticipate the promised riches to come. For it is only by Your grace that we are also raised with Jesus and

enjoy the newness of life as the people of God. May our boasting be only in You, Father, and never of our own devising. Father, we love You and we bring ourselves now as living sacrifices before You, all because of Your grace, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

In this next section we'll be looking at Sola Fida which means stands for faith alone. What does it mean? Before I get to what it means, I want to be clear with you first about what it doesn't mean. Faith alone is not a blind faith. To be blind is to be in darkness. Faith alone does not lead us into more darkness. Faith alone is actually a trust in God that brings us into the light and it dispels darkness in our life. Faith helps us to see God, ourselves and the world around us rightly.

Secondly, faith alone is also not naivete. It is based on sound reason and historical evidence. Peter writes in II Peter 1:16, *[16] For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* Faith alone does not rest on this and fables, but on the testimony of those who saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears.

Thirdly, faith alone is not just believing there is one God. For James reminds us that even the demons believe that, and they shudder (James 2:19). You see knowledge and understanding of God and the Gospel doesn't mean we possess faith. Saving faith involves the will as well as the mind.

Lastly, faith alone is not combined with works. The Scriptures are clear. No one can be justified by works. I love the way it says it in Galatians 2:16; *[16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.* Here Paul reminds us that we're not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ and we have to believe in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by the works of the law, no one will be justified. Paul says it this way in Ephesians 2:8-9, *[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

So, what is faith alone? It is by grace alone and it is the gift of God. What do you do when someone gives you a gift? Nothing, right? If it's a true gift, you don't do anything for it. So, this means God justifies us apart from our works, in spite of our works, which before we came to Christ, our works were all filthy rags in His sight. So, this leaves no room for boasting in our own righteousness, in our own works. The only thing we can boast in is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When it comes to faith alone, what matters most is not the amount of our faith, but the object of our faith, which is Jesus Christ. My life verse is Philippians 3:8-9 and this passage reminds us of the great worth of trusting in Christ as our Lord and Savior. Philippians 3:8-9 says *[8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.*

The fourth of the five solas is Solus Christus which means in Christ alone. God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So, when we say that God saved sinners in Christ alone, we are confessing what Paul said to Timothy in I Timothy 2:5 which says *[5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

We are also confessing what Peter says before the Sanhedrin, who have just finished accusing him and beating him, when he says to them in Acts 4:11-12, *[11] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. [12] And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* We are saved in Christ alone.

So, while these great reformation principles – Sola Scriptura, Sola gratia, Sola fide, Solus Christus, and Soli Deo Gloria – are all indispensable, inseparable and dependent upon one another, they're interwoven. There's one that's a linchpin for them all. Christ alone (solus Christus) is the hub around which the spokes of salvation turn and the center that binds them all together. Why is that? It's because solus Christus (Christ alone) is not just a doctrine that teaches us but it's a doctrine that teaches us that eternal life cannot be given to us as a thing separate from God Himself, because we get salvation in Christ, who is God Himself. God has not just given us salvation but He has given Himself to us.

Solus Christus means that salvation isn't merely a doctrine, but it's in a Person – Jesus Christ. Solus Christus keeps us from making this mistake of separating the blessing from the Blessor – the gift from the Giver. Think about it this way. Think about the other Solas; Scripture alone is our supreme authority, but it is Christ alone who is the interpretive key for all of Scripture and it is on His authority that we accept Scripture's authority as the authority of our lives. He is the Word of God made flesh. Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 5:39-40, *[39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* You won't find eternal life unless you're looking for Jesus and come to Him for it.

The Scriptures, as important as they are, as they are our authority for all of life, but they are a map and a compass to guide us to Christ. God save sinners by grace alone, sola Gratia. At the time of the Reformation, grace had become thought of as this substance – something that could be infused into relics or into bread and into wine, something that could be handed out like candy in a parade by priests and popes, something that could be denied to people as they are under discipline, something that could be sold for money. But grace describes God's disposition to us, His favorable disposition to us, who are detestable and unfavorable, ill favored.

How can a holy, just and righteous God show us favor when we are sinners unworthy of that favor? It's because He can give it to us as a free gift because Christ paid the price for it. Romans 6:23 says, *[23] The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* We're saved through faith. Faith is the means by which we take hold of this gift in Christ. But as my brother said, what's important is not the strength of the faith, but the object of the faith. I can have unshakable faith in a piece of twine to hold me up as I belay down a cliff but that twine is going to break and I'm going to fall to my death just the same.

In Christ, we have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters in to the inner places behind the curtain. We have a sure and steadfast hope in Christ - Someone not just some thing – but Someone we can put our faith in and all we do is rightly directed towards the glory of God alone – soli Deo gloria, but it is Christ alone who is the radiance of God's glory in the exact imprint of His nature. It is when we open the Scriptures and see there the glory of the face of Jesus Christ revealed, that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another. It is in Christ that the glory of God goes from un-sharable to sharable for He says, "I want to share my glory with another" for in Christ He says, 'My glory is yours.' Everything that belongs to Christ belongs to us.

The Word which God has spoken, the faith which God is given, the grace which God extends to the unworthy and the glory which God alone possesses and has promised to the inglorious, make no sense and would be of no use apart from the Son of God who became a man to give His life as a ransom for many. Our only hope in life and death is not that we understand the Scriptures, is not that we understand justification and is not that we understand grace and faith. Our only hope in life and death is that we belong to God, body and soul and to Jesus Christ, our faithful Savior. Why? It is because eternal life is not that we understand doctrines, but eternal life, Jesus prayed is this; that they know You, the only God in Jesus Christ whom You have sent. This is eternal life that you know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3).

There's a question that's often asked in evangelism, which is 'If you were standing before God and had to give an answer, why should I allow You into heaven?' Your answer is not going to be 'I really understand justification. I went to Westminster Seminary.' Your answer better be "the Man on the middle cross told me I could come. Jesus Christ told me I could come." That's the only answer.

What is your life and what is your salvation about? Hear as God speaks His truth in love through His servant, the Psalmist, who is wide awake to reality. Psalm 115:1 says [1] *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* I love this simple and yet very profound Word for three reasons.

First of all, this Word awakens us to our deepest problem. 'Not to us. Not to us.' Sin living in me and sin living in you, is a dark gravity, a black hole that pulls us inward on ourselves. Saint Augustine captured the problem when he coined the Latin phrase, *Incurvatus in se* which literally means 'curved in on ourselves.' Martin Luther unpacked the problem still more in his lectures on Romans as he said "Our fallen nature is so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself, but even uses God to attain these gifts. We wickedly, curvately and viciously seek all things, even God for our own sake." But there's hope.

This Word not only awakens us to our deepest problem, but secondly, this Word awakens us to our highest purpose. I was born and raised in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and it was only a matter of time when I would grow up to become a Carolina basketball fan. I was a young man when my father would take me to Carmichael Auditorium to watch Dean Smith's Tar Heels and I remember the band would play as the team would come out on the court and the crowd would stand up and clap. Here's a secret of mine for I thought I would never say this out loud, but I thought to myself, "I like that. I would like to get that kind of glory, to get that kind of praise." Do you feel it? It's that gravitational pull that turns you in on yourself, but again, there's hope because this same Word awakens us to our highest purpose – to Him, to His Name be the glory. This is utterly surprising.

The psalmist is not curved inward on himself, but is curved upward and outward. This is supernatural. This is a Red Sea moment – a deliverance from the slavery of a self-centered life and the deliverance to the freedom of a Christ centered life. Sin living in me and sin living in you has more than met its match in the Spirit of God who lives in us. Do you know something of the Holy Spirit's work to turn you upside down and inside out? For me, I remember one summer in 1984, I was on a missions' project in Panama City Beach with Campus Crusade for Christ. One morning I was sitting at the Diplomat Hotel reading II Corinthians 5, and I read these words and they turned me upside down and inside out. II Corinthians 5:14-15 says [14] *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;* [15] *and He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.*

Do you know of some of this gravitational pull upward and outward? How are we saved from curved inward to curved upward? How are we saved from seeking glory for me to seeking glory for God? This Word awakens us not only to our deepest problem, not only to our highest purpose, but to our One and only Savior. Notice the focus is on Your (His) steadfast love, Your (His) faithfulness. The Reformation was a holy spiritual movement to overthrow anyone who would stand in God's place and to reinstate God into His rightful place.

What's ultimately at stake is who gets the glory? Who gets the praise? Who gets the credit for our salvation? There is a tie that binds, an ultimate purpose that unites the four Solas that we've considered. God's salvation is revealed in Scripture alone. God's salvation is achieved by Christ alone. God's salvation is bestowed by grace alone, and God's salvation is received by faith alone. Why these four ways? It is so that God alone gets the glory. Do you see? Scripture restrips our way of seeing, wanting and living? This is what your life and your salvation is about.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You that we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed in Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. In Jesus' Name, Amen.