

# **The Five Solas of the Reformation**

**Prepared for WellSpring Church**

**October 30, November 6, 2011**

## **1. Introduction**

- a. Engage: I was asked recently if the Reformation is still important today.**
- b. Review/Preview**
  - i. October 31 is Reformation Day**
  - ii. Luther**
  - iii. Reformational Theology**
  - iv. Five Short Phrases to summarize the differences between the Roman Catholic teaching on salvation and the Biblical teaching. Stated in Latin, the common theological language of the day they each one start with the word *Sola* which means only or alone.**
  - v. They are *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, sola Chistus* and *sola Deo Gloria*.**
- c. Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone according to the Scriptures alone for the glory of God alone.**
- d. The Three Questions**
  - i. What does it mean?**
  - ii. Why was it important?**
  - iii. Why is it still important today?**
- e. Big Idea: If we are going to be true to the Bibles teaching we are compelled to retain these five solas.**

## **2. Sola Scriptura**

**a. What does it mean?**

**i. Scripture alone is the final authority-even over Tradition.**

**ii. What it is not:**

**1. Tradition 0 (i.e. no tradition at all, no respect for the traditions of interpretation throughout the history of the church)**

**2. Or: *Solo Scriptura***

**3. It may be helpful to say it this way: "our final authority is Scripture alone, but not a Scripture that is alone. Scripture is the only source of revelation. Scripture alone is inspired. Scripture alone is inherently infallible. Scripture alone is the supreme normative standard. But Scripture does not exist in a vacuum. It was given to the church within the context of the apostolic gospel. Scripture alone is the final authoritative standard, but it is a standard that must be interpreted and preached by the Church. (Keith A. Mathison, "Sola Scriptura" After Darkness, Light, Essays in Honor of R.C. Sproul, edited by R.C. Sproul, jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 43.**

**iii. We see and accept Scripture as the end of revelation and the final authority. Here are some very important things to be said about Scripture.**

**1. Inspiration—Every word given and breathed out from the heart and mind of God by the Holy Spirit.**

**2. Inerrancy –Because it is God’s Word, it has the character of God, it is true and without error.**

**3. Infallibility—Because God is incapable of making an error, his word is incapable making an error**

**4. Authority—Because it is God’s word is has ultimate and final authority. What it says, God says.**

**b. Why was it important?**

- i. The Church (Roman Catholic), had in the Middle Ages, moved from “Tradition I” to Tradition II (Tradition and Scripture as equal sources of authority) and was quickly moving toward Tradition III (The traditions of the church, declared by the church as dogma supersede the Scriptures).**
- ii. New and innovative teachings were coming in and true doctrine was being ignored.**

**c. Why is it still important today?**

- i. Everything we do depends on what we consider to be out authority.**
- ii. The Center of Authority in our culture has moved from the external to the internal.**
- iii. Even for the Christian the center of authority is less on the clear word of God and more on feelings, emotions, and experiences—even other people.**
- iv. Even where there are external sources of authority, the Bible is not considered as one of them...**
- v. Here is where the battle for sola scriptura will be fought today: the sufficiency of scripture over: (Psychology, Mysticism, Pragmatism)**
  - 1.**

**vi. Practical Applications**

- 1. Methods of Evangelism. Not even Jesus depended on miracles and signs and wonders when he preached (We see Paul preaching in the Acts without miracles)**
- 2. Sanctification**
- 3. Guidance**

## **4. Social Reformation**

### **3. Sola Fide**

#### **a. What does it mean?**

- i. It means that salvation is procured and received by nothing more than believing the good news. The problem with this is that the good news is absolutely unbelievable. As one theologian said, only God could have written the Christmas story. I am convinced that most of us find the biggest and most desperate struggle of our lives in believing the gospel.**

#### **1. What do I have a hard time believing?**

- a. That I am as wicked as I am**
- b. That sin is what the Bible says that it is.  
(An offense against God)**
- c. That the love of God is what it is.**
- d. That Jesus is all that I need**
- e. That the gift of salvation is free**
- f. That the acceptance of God is all that I really need in life**
- g. That God is the gift of the Gospel**

- 2. That believing is not mere assent of agreement. James Boice writes, "For many evangelicals faith is only a mental assent to certain doctrines. It is something we exercise once at the start of our Christian lives, after which we can live more or less in any way we please. It does not matter in terms of our salvation whether or not this 'faith' makes a difference. Some Evangelicals even teach that a person could be saved and secure if he or she possesses a dead or dying faith or, incredible as it seems, if he or she apostatizes denying**

**Jesus.” Boice calls this an eviscerated faith.  
What is Biblical Faith?**

**a. Three Elements. *Notitia* Or, knowledge or awareness *assensus*, or belief or assent, *fiducia* trust, committment.**

**i. *Notitia* Or, knowledge or awareness**

**ii. *assensus*, or belief or assent**

**iii. *fiducia* trust, committment**

**3. That faith is the *only* thing necessary to procure and activate the grace of God.**

**ii. Our daily struggles against sin “teaches us to cry out to [God] and rely on him instead of ourselves—or our addictive substance. Faith and trust are qualities God prizes. Without daily struggles there would be no compelling reason to call out to him and say, ‘I need you,’ which is the definition of faith.”<sup>1</sup>**

**b. Why was it important?**

**i. Works Justification**

**ii. Merits of the Saints, Indulgences, pilgrimages, etc.**

**iii. Assurance**

**c. Why is it still important today?**

**i. Because Satan still uses doubt to weaken us**

**ii. Because every sin is a matter of not believing God**

**iii. Because we still want to “do” and to add something to Christ’s work in order to earn our salvation. In the history or the church people have always tended towards works, or**

**iv. We tend towards antinomianism**

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<sup>1</sup> Edward T. Welch, Addictions a Banquet in the Grave, Finding hope in the Power of the Gospel, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001),157

#### **4. Sola Gratia**

**a. What does it mean? Salvation is completely and fully a free gift of God given completely and freely by God to whom he will and when he will irrespective of any consideration or motivation outside of himself. In other words not only can an individual not earn grace, but there is nothing in the individual sinner past present or future that inclines God to grant the gifts of faith, repentance and justification. Salvation is completely God-centered. No one can incline himself or another person toward or into salvation.**

**b. Why was it important?**

**i. Pre-Reformation theology teaches that grace is something that is given *in order to make it possible to do the works necessary to earn salvation.***

**ii. Because of the difference between what Luther called the theology of Glory and the theology of the Cross.**

**iii. Why did the reformers insist on a theology of salvation that was based and founded on Grace alone? It is because of a lack of understanding of four essential truths**

**1. The sinfulness of Sin. What really is sin?**

**a. "An infinite offense against God's Honor"**

**b. We see sin in relationship to ourselves:**

**i. Missing the mark**

**ii. Trespassing a law**

**iii. Failing to measure up**

**iv. Hurting ourselves or hurting others.**

**c. Sin is against God. It is**

**i. Spitting in his face,**

**ii. John Bunyan's Definition:**

**"Sin is the dare of God's justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of love"**

**iii. It is not ever to be merely defined in terms of humans. It is not bad habits,**

**d. Sin is a hatred for all that God is in terms of his Rule and Holiness. It is an enmity toward him.**

**e. How serious is sin? Look what it does to us Rom 3:10-11**

**i. There is none righteous**

**ii. there is none who understands**

**iii. there is none who seeks God.**

**2. The reality and rightness of God's judgment—His Holiness and his justice demand it.**

**3. The utter and complete spiritual inability of each human being. The reason that no one seeks God is that**

**a. They do not want to**

**b. You do not want to because you cannot**

**4. God's Sovereign Freedom to do as he wishes. In other words, nothing outside of God compels God to do anything.**

**Allow me this lengthy quote from James Montgomery Boice:  
"When the Reformers spoke about "grace alone" (*sola gratia*), they were saying that sinners have no claim upon God, none at all; that God owes them nothing but punishment for sins; and of those who are being saved, it is only because it pleases him to do it and for no other reason. Today large numbers of evangelicals undermine and effectively destroy this doctrine by supposing that human beings are basically good; that God owes everyone a chance to be saved; and**

that if we are saved, in the final analysis it is because of our own good decision to receive the Jesus who is offered to us. "This is why the doctrine of election is opposed by so many. It doesn't seem fair to them. But as soon as we introduce the doctrine of fairness, we introduce a standard of right by which God has to save all or at least give everyone an equal chance of being saved. And that is not race! If God were motivated only by what is right, without any consideration of a grace made possible by the work of Christ, all would be condemned and all would spend eternity in hell. This is because 'there is none righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God' (Romans 3:10-11)." (James Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*)

**c. Why is it still important today?**

- i. Mostly it is important because we are still filled with Pride.**
- ii. Works orientation of the Heart**
- iii. Pragmatism and a confidence in human ability**
- iv. Because we still want to put ourselves in the forefront of our salvation experience.**
  - 1. I have great worth therefore God sent his Son to die**
  - 2. There is a spark of divinity in me**
  - 3. we have a small view of sin that makes us want to see it as something that we can choose to overcome.**

**5. Sola Christus**

- a. What does it mean? That there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ and a full faith in him.**
  - i. The Cross as satisfaction**
  - ii. The Cross as Substitution**
  - iii. The cross as Sacrifice**

**b. Why was it important?**

- i. The Church as the dispenser of Grace**
- ii. The addition of Mary and the saints and the treasury of merits.**

**The great Princeton Theologian B.B. Warfield wrote: The *saving power* of faith resides thus not in itself, but in the Almighty savior on whom it rests... It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ that saves, but Christ saves through faith. the saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith [Jesus Christ and His work]. ...we could not more radically misconceive it than by transferring faith even the smallest fraction of that saving energy which is attributed in the Scriptures wholly to Christ himself.” (B.B. Warfield, Biblical Doctrines, quoted by Sinclair Ferguson “Sola Fide” In After Darkness Light)**

**c. Why is it still important today?**

- i. Universalism (Rob Bell and there is no hell) and Inclusivism**
- ii. Many roads to God**
- iii. Sincerity and Goodness. It doesn't matter really what you believe, it only matters that you are sincere and do your best to live according to your own understanding and value-system.**
- iv. Toleration and the scandal of the exclusivity of the Cross. Because we value tolerance we want a God who is tolerant as well. E for excellent becomes E for Effort.**

**6. Sola Gloria**

- a. What does it mean? That everything exists for the purpose of bringing glory and honor to God the Father. “...the five *solas* are truly one. But if we were forced to pick one that best subsumes all the others, it would no**

doubt be the last one, *solī Deo Gloria*, 'to God alone the glory.' If we began here, rather than ending here, we would surely still end here. More than anything else, what distinguishes the Reformed faith from all others is that it strive to understand all things in such a way that God alone receives the glory." (R.C. Sproul jr., After Darkness Light)

- i. Exalting Him
  - ii. Adding to his reputation
  - iii. Making him known as the highest and greatest, the only good, wise, perfect, all-powerful, just, knowing, loving God. He is the epitome of all that is good.
  - iv. It is practicing the truth that God will share his glory with no one and with nothing.
- b. Why was it important?
- i. Glory of Man always wants to get in the way.
  - ii. In the pre-reformation church it is the concept as pope as vicar of Christ sharing the glory of Christ.
  - iii. Because it answers all ontological questions of Why?
    1. Why did God Create?
    2. Why is there sin
    3. Why is the weather as it is
    4. Why is the world as it is
    5. Why are people as they are?
    6. All for the glory of God.
- c. Why is it still important today? There are several reasons—here are some that occur to me
- i. The worship impulse in us a horribly perverted
  - ii. We lift up people to praise
  - iii. We are always putting ourselves in the front.

- 1. What happens when people are introduced?**
- 2. How do we lead in stories or respond to the stories of others?**
- 3. How do we seek to make ourselves known?**
  - a. Clothes we wear—Jamie Clark’s mom, try not to draw attention to yourself by the clothes you wear—why else would I wear them?**
  - b. Defensiveness in what we think are accusations.**
  - c. Making a scene.**

**7. Conclusion and Move to the Lord’s Supper.**

- a. Christ Has Died**
- b. God’s Justice has been satisfied**
- c. Christ has risen, The Substitutionary sacrifice has been accepted.**
- d. God has promised to save all who put their faith in Christ alone to receive God’s Grace**
- e. The Lord’s Supper is the promise**