

FBC Service Sunday October 29, 2023, The Radical Reformation

When you drive up and down the streets of many towns, you'll find churches of various denominations. The Baptist Church on the corner; United and Presbyterian Churches downtown.

Your drive through town didn't always look like that. Such diversity of religions and beliefs has been a relatively modern movement, one that began with the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

A shift that caused a massive exodus from the Roman Catholic Church – the overwhelmingly dominant form of Christianity and ruling force in Europe.

Until that point, for a person to feel connected to God, the Catholic Church was the only place to turn to hear the scripture or take part in the sacraments from parish priests – baptism, confirmation, communion, penance, marriage, and last rites.

And it was, the Church also claimed, through performing good deeds that led Christians to forgiveness of their sins and, upon death, to Heaven.

The Roman Catholic Church was the most powerful institution in the world and the Pope and Church had a far-reaching authority.

This Tuesday marks the 506th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation – a protest, a reform, and a significant turning point in world history.

The word Protestant originally was used to describe those who protested and revolted against the Catholic Church's totalitarian control and teachings.

The Reformation refers to a spiritual rebirth and a return to the gospel in the 16th Century under Reformers such as Martin Luther, and others who protested various unbiblical practices of the Catholic Church, and promoted a return to sound biblical doctrine.

Martin Luther is best known for lighting the spark that set this movement ablaze throughout Europe, forever reshaping the church

Five sayings were developed shortly after the Reformation to summarize the key doctrinal distinctives.

Sola Scriptura - In Scripture Alone

Sola Gratia - By Grace Alone

Sola Fide - Through Faith Alone

Solus Christu- Because of Christ Alone

Soli Deo Gloria - For the Glory of God Alone

We don't have to learn the Latin, but I do want us to look into these five foundational truths in English.

In Scripture Alone

By Grace Alone

Through Faith Alone

Because of Christ Alone

For the Glory of God Alone

The key word in these five phrases **or solas**, is the word **“alone”** or only. The idea is that it’s **“solely,”** not **“and”** or **“in addition to.”** In the words of theologian R. C. Sproul, “It is no exaggeration to say that the eye of the Reformation tornado was this one little word.”

Each of these statements are essential.

All five are closely tied together and build on one another.

Even though we’re looking at statements from the 16th Century, I hope your eyes are not glazing over at the thought of a history lesson.

I want to show that these statements come right from Scripture and are as relevant to our cultural context today as they were back then.

These statements provide a great summary of the foundational truths we believe here at First Baptist.

The teaching of the Reformation swirled around a fivefold repetition of the word sola, and was a radical message for that day, (and should be for ours) because it called for a commitment to an entirely God-centred view of faith and life.

The first “sola” is foundational because the other four flow from it.

1. Sola Scriptura: In Scripture Alone.

2 Timothy 3:16: *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”*

The very first word **“All”** stands out. Every single word and letter of Scripture, from the first verse in Genesis to the last verse in Revelation, is *“breathed out by God.”*

Because Scripture is inspired, it’s also inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient.

Often the Israelites were told that they were to obey God’s Word and teach it to their children. And Jesus, said this in Matthew 4:4: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

The word **“profitable”** means beneficial. Beneficial in.

Teaching that provides content, so we know what’s right.

Reproof that brings conviction, so we know what’s not right.

We're then corrected so we know how to get right.

And training changes our character so we can stay right.

Verse 17 tells us that when we allow the Word to do its work, we're then equipped and outfitted for effective ministry: *"That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

What a great reminder that we're to get the Bible into our heads and hearts and then live it out, unashamedly declaring that Scripture is our highest and final authority, not our politically correct culture, or the church or the Pope or the Supreme Court.

This is at the core of biblical Christianity, that the Bible and only the Bible is the basis of our faith.

In 1521, Martin Luther, was summoned to appear before the Roman Emperor to defend what he had taught and written.

He said: "unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God."

Where did Luther and the other reformers get such boldness and certainty? **They believed in Sola Scriptura - In Scripture Alone**

The conviction that all Scripture is breathed-out by God, led men like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale to translate the text of the Bible into the common language of the people.

At that time only Latin translations were available, which most couldn't read, and the only copies were kept in churches where only clergy could teach its text.

The Bible alone became the foundational battle cry of the Reformation. The question is the same in our day, isn't it? **What is the final authority for the Christian?**

Luther laid it out clearly: **"A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or council without it."** When asked to explain why the Reformation spread throughout Europe, Luther simply said, **"The Word did it all."**

When the preacher Charles Spurgeon was asked to defend the Bible, he replied, "Defend the Bible? I would as soon defend a lion! Unchain it and it will defend itself." If you want God to speak to you, open the Bible and start reading.

We get the Bible into our head by getting into it. The Word resides in our heart when we let it get into us. And it's fleshed out in our daily lives when we live it out obediently.

Will we stand on the Scriptures more than what society says? Will we hold to its precepts or be swayed by polls and politicians and cancel culture, and the woke generation?

My church family. It will become more and more difficult for Christians to believe the Bible and say with Luther, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

Folks, let's determine to live out what we know to be true – regardless of the cost or consequences.

So here's the first sola: **In Scripture Alone.** And the second one is.

2. Solo Gratia: By Grace Alone.

Ephesians 2:8-9: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

Grace can be defined as "God's favour toward the unworthy" or "God's benevolence on the undeserving."

This passage teaches that we're saved by grace. It's nothing we have done but rather is a gift. We don't work for it; we simply receive it.

A gift is much different from a loan, which requires repayment or return by the recipient. **The fact that grace is a gift means that nothing is owed in return.**

There is no cost to the person who receives a gift. A gift is free to the recipient, although it's not free to the giver, who bears the expense.

Once a gift has been given, ownership of the gift has been transferred and it is now ours to keep.

The Bible teaches that grace is God's unmerited and unearned favour. The gift and the act of giving, have nothing at all to do with our merit.

One of the many excesses and errors in the Catholic Church in Luther's day was the selling of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins.

If people gave enough money, they could have their sins forgiven and even pardon a loved one from purgatory. One of the jingles sung in German during that time has since been translated into English: *"As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs."*

It was the selling of indulgences that led Luther to write out his famous 95 Theses, one in particular, a scathing condemnation on anyone who believed that they could be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters.

Let me make a point about giving. When you and I give during the offering, we're not giving in order to get something. **Simply put, we give in gratitude for all we've been given.**

Here are the solas we've covered so far...

In Scripture Alone

By Grace Alone - And number 3.

3. Solo Fide: Through Faith Alone.

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" **Romans 1:17**

This verse was the moment of great awakening for Martin Luther.

It brings us to the very heart of the Reformation – that the free gift of salvation is received through faith alone.

Luther called justification by faith “the article by which and by which the church stands.

Works don't work. Penances don't work, indulgences don't work.

You can't do enough good because you're not good enough for God. If you want to be saved, Acts 16:31 gives the crystal clear answer, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”*

The solas we've covered so far are...

In Scripture Alone

By Grace Alone

Through Faith Alone - And number 4.

4. Solus Christus: Because of Christ Alone.

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

We see that Christ died “for our sake” by... **Taking our place.**

He took all of our sins collectively on Himself. He was our sacrifice. He died so we can live.

It means that when we trust Christ, our sin is credited to Christ's account and his righteousness is credited to our account.

He takes our debt and we get His credit. He paid what we owed (and could never pay) and He gives us what He has (and we could never earn).

You cannot substitute anyone or anything else with the one and only Saviour who is our sin substitute. Neither a priest nor a pope, neither Mary nor the Mass, neither saints nor superficial spirituality, neither relics nor religion.

That's why when Peter was preaching in Acts 4:12, he made this statement: *“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.”*

In Scripture Alone

By Grace Alone

Through Faith Alone

Because of Christ Alone – and finally number 5.....

5. Soli Deo Gloria: For the Glory of God Alone.

1 Corinthians 10:31: *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

The Reformation got rid of the dividing line between the sacred and the secular, arguing that all of life is to be lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Luther concluded the work of all believers – even the most **ordinary – could be done to the glory of God.**

“How could the devil have led us more effectively astray than by the narrow conception that service to God takes place only in church and by the works done therein...the whole world could abound with services to the Lord, not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, field.”

Our purpose in life is not to gain popularity, gather possessions or garner pleasure. The goal of life is to give God the glory alone; to live our lives in such a way that He is pleased, and others are drawn to Him.

I love how the question from the Westminster Shorter Confession: “What is the chief end of man?” is answered, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

The story of the Bible is all about God’s glory.

I sort of get it when people say that the Bible is God’s love letter to us. **But it’s actually a lot more than that.** **The story of the Bible is all about God’s glory.** Romans 11:36: *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

To me, that’s simply more evidence that God loves to unleash the extraordinary through ordinary people. These radical reformers didn’t realize they were doing extraordinary things.

They were simply being bold and obedient. **And that’s what God calls ordinary people to do today...all for the glory of God alone.** *“To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”* (Ephesians 3:21)

Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany more than 500 years ago, the reverberations of the Reformation he started are still felt today.