

The Five Solas of the Reformation

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1. *Sola Scriptura*: The Scripture Alone is the Standard

The doctrine that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority was the "Formal Principle" of the Reformation. In 1521 at the historic interrogation of Luther at the Diet of Worms, he declared his conscience to be captive to the Word of God saying, "Unless I am overcome with testimonies from Scripture or with evident reasons – for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils, since they have often erred and contradicted one another – I am overcome by the Scripture texts which I have adduced, and my conscience is bound by God's Word." Similarly, the Belgic Confession stated, "We believe that [the] holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein....Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures nor ought we to consider custom or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God... Therefore, we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule" (VII).

As the Scripture says,

*Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Thy law....I will bow down toward Thy holy temple, And give thanks to Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth; For Thou hast magnified Thy word according to all Thy name....You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.** (Psalm 119:18; Psalm 138:2; II Tim. 3:14-17)*

2. *Soli Deo Gloria!* For the Glory of God Alone

The Reformation reclaimed the Scriptural teaching of the sovereignty of God over every aspect of the believer's life. All of life is to be lived to the glory of God. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." This great and all-consuming purpose was emphasized by those in the 16th and 17th Centuries who sought to reform

the church according to the Word of God. In contrast to the monastic division of life into sacred versus secular perpetuated by Roman Church, the reformers saw **all of life** to be lived under the Lordship of Christ. Every activity of the Christian is to be sanctified unto the glory of God.

As the Scripture says,

*Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God; Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.** (1CO 10:31; 1PE 4:11; REV 1:6; 2PE 3:1; EPH 3:21; REV 7:12; ROM 11:36)*

3. Solo Christo! By Christ's Work Alone are We Saved

The Reformation called the church back to faith in Christ as the sole mediator between God and man. While the Roman church held that "there is a purgatory and that the souls there detained are helped by the intercessions of the faithful" and that "Saints are to be venerated and invoked;" "that their relics are to be venerated" – the reformers taught that salvation was by Christ's work alone. As John Calvin said in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "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 favor and fatherly love!" Likewise the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 30 asks, "Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior who seek their salvation and happiness in saints, in themselves, or anywhere else? They do not; for though they boast of him in words yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior: for one of these two things must be true that either Jesus is not a complete Savior or that they who by a true faith receive this Saviour must find all things in him necessary to their salvation."

As the Scripture says,

*There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time...**For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (1TI 2:5-6; COL 1:13-18)*

4. Sola Gratia: Salvation by Grace Alone

A central cry of the Reformation was salvation by grace. Though the Roman church taught that Mass is a "sacrifice [which] is truly propitiatory" and that by the Mass "God...grant[s] us grace and the gift of penitence, remits our faults and even our enormous sins" – the reformers returned to the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Our righteous standing before God is imputed to us by grace

because of the work of Christ Jesus our Lord. In contrast to the doctrines of self-merit taught by Rome, sola gratia and the accompanying doctrines of grace – total depravity, unconditional election, particular redemption, and perseverance of the saints – were preached by all the reformers throughout the Protestant movement. As the Baptist Confession of 1689 says, "Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did, by the sacrifice of himself in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them, make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf;...their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners."

As the Scripture says,

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. **In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us.** (Ephesians 1:3-8)*

5. Sola Fide: Justification by Faith Alone

The "Material Principle" of the Reformation was justification by faith alone. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love." The Genevan Confession likewise pointed out the necessity of those justified living by faith saying, "We confess that the entrance which we have to the great treasures and riches of the goodness of God that is vouchsafed us is by faith; inasmuch as, in certain confidence and assurance of heart, we believe in the promises of the gospel, and receive Jesus Christ as he is offered to us by the Father and described to us by the Word of God (Genevan 11).

As the Scripture says,

*Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, **"The righteous man shall live by faith."** (Galatians 3:6-11)*

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