

The Five Solas of the Reformation

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[0 : 00] Over the last few weeks, I've had the opportunity to teach our high schoolers about the five solas of the Reformation.

Well, in Colin's absence this morning, I'd like to share with you at least a portion of what I've shared with them. It will be almost impossible, well, it will be impossible to condense down what we've covered in seven or so weeks in one day.

But almost a year ago, I created for myself a special notebook, if you will, for studying through the 1689 Baptist Confession.

It's what I've called a confession journal. It has the text of the confession on one side, a blank page on the other side to take some notes. Well, after some conversations with a few friends, I have eventually made it available to the public, and this has sparked a few interesting conversations. In one case, a woman I know emailed me to ask, why study a church confession? Why not just study the Bible?

[1 : 07] And this is a fairly common sentiment among Christians today. In fact, you'll often hear Christians say something like, I don't need a creed. I don't need an official confession.

All I need is the Bible. Well, in my mind, that raises a couple of questions. First, when somebody says, the only creed I need is the Bible, I'm tempted to ask, well, isn't that statement itself a creed? But more to the point, I want to ask, well, what do you believe about fill in the blank? Of course, they can go to the Bible for an answer to any kind of question like that, but a church confession or creed is meant to streamline the process, if you will.

The Bible is a big book, and a church confession takes what the Bible teaches and presents it at least the most important, most foundational doctrines in a systematic, organized way.

Now, to be clear, a sound confession doesn't teach anything new. It doesn't teach anything the Bible doesn't teach.

[2 : 22] It simply takes what the Bible teaches and organizes it and articulates it in a way that is very helpful to us who are, in fact, studying the Bible.

The Apostle Paul tells the Ephesians that he does not want the church to be tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

So how do we avoid this? I mean, today we're inundated with false teachings and false ideas everywhere we turn. We hear them in personal conversations.

We see them online. We see them on TV. We read them in books. And obviously, the Bible serves as our anchor as these things threaten to toss us all over the place.

And I tend to think of a sound church confession, like the 1689 confession, as the rope or the chain that tethers our boat to the anchor, which is the Bible.

[3 : 26] A confession does not replace the Bible. It's not an addition to the Bible. It's an aid for understanding the Bible.

It helps us remain tethered to what the Bible teaches. And it can be such a tremendously helpful resource. Well, along the way, I've met people who wanted to study the Bible for the first time, and they're completely intimidated.

Again, the Bible is a big book. So on a few occasions, I have given someone the 1689 confession. And I didn't give it to them so that the confession would be a filter through which they read and understood the Bible.

I gave it to them to serve as a guide. If they want to know more about, say, God, well, the confession has a chapter on God and contains a lot of Bible references. If they want to know more about salvation, the confession has plenty to say about that, and again, includes many Bible references.

The confession is simply a way to make it easier for them to find what they're looking for in Scripture and study it further. Well, in some cases, I have found that even the 1689 confession is a little too intimidating.

[4 : 46] It has 32 chapters. It has lots of paragraphs. It has some words that someone may not readily understand just yet. So what do I do in these cases?

What can I give someone to point them in the right direction? What kind of simple framework can I give so that they come away with a better understanding of theology and the Bible in general? Well, I've had at least some success simply explaining the five solas of the Reformation. If we really understand the five solas, they provide a pretty comprehensive framework of Christian fundamentals while remaining very accessible to a general audience.

The framework is so simple, in fact, that we can capture all five points in one sentence, which usually goes something like this. According to Scripture alone, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone. Sola Gratia, grace alone. Sola Fide, faith alone. Solus Christus, Christ alone. Sola Deo Gloria, the glory of God alone.

[6 : 09] Now, we may not remember the Latin phrases, but the five solas are pretty easy to remember. According to Scripture alone, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

And if we can remember that, assuming we really understand these five points and what they mean, we have a great framework for understanding the Bible.

Salvation in particular, the gospel in particular. Now, to be clear, these five solas were not formulated in quite this way during the Protestant Reformation.

We call them the five solas of the Reformation. And all five points emerged out of the Reformation, or maybe it would be better to say they were rediscovered or restored during the Reformation. But it's not as though Martin Luther nailed the five solas to the church door in Wittenberg or anything like that. As far as I know, John Calvin never articulated the five solas in a simple five-point outline.

[7 : 20] But because of what the Reformers taught, the church was able to give us this rather helpful five-sola structure.

Actually, I don't think it was until the 19th century before we had this five-sola structure as we know it. The doctrines were there, of course, but we didn't have the nice, neat, memorable outline like you see up here.

In short, I believe the five solas can serve as an excellent framework for someone who is first attempting to study and understand the Bible.

And it serves as an excellent framework for established believers who want to remain tethered to the truth of the Bible, our anchor in what is undoubtedly a constant storm of false ideas and false doctrines.

It's the kind of thing you can stamp right on the cover of the Bible so that every time we sit down or we read, we remember Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, the glory of God alone.

[8 : 30] Now, as I said, the five solas were rediscovered, if you will, through the Protestant Reformation. And if you know your church history, you know the medieval church was replete with false doctrines.

And most people couldn't know any different because most people didn't have access to the Bible. They had to rely on whatever church leaders taught them.

And perhaps the most damning doctrine of the church was that salvation requires Christ plus works. Christ plus your righteousness. If you weren't righteous enough when you die, and most people weren't, according to their doctrine, you would not go to heaven.

Never mind what Christ did on the cross. You must be righteous enough on your own. So the medieval church's version of the five solas might go something like this.

[9 : 34] According to church tradition, we are saved by grace plus works through penance and personal righteousness with the help of Christ for the glory of Rome or the glory of the church.

But again, no one really questioned this because how could they? The Bible was in Latin and no one could read Latin. Plus, lay members of the church really weren't supposed to read the Bible and try to understand it for themselves.

They were supposed to rely on the teachings and interpretations of church authorities. So no one really knew to question anything, that is, until Martin Luther and the Reformers came along. And it's worth noting that there were men before Luther who questioned things and were executed by the church for it. But the thrust of the Reformation didn't begin until Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church in Wittenberg.

So prior to the Reformation, people couldn't really rely on the Bible. They couldn't read the Bible. They were taught that salvation is not by God's grace alone.

[10:51] They were taught that they must essentially earn it. If not in this life, then maybe once they reach a place called purgatory. And of course, purgatory itself is not biblical.

But again, the average person in the church pew didn't know that. Prior to the Reformation, the church did not believe salvation was through faith alone.

You can't merely come to the Lord empty-handed and ask for mercy. Again, you must earn it. You must make yourself right with God. The medieval church did not believe that salvation was by Christ alone.

It was not through faith alone. In Christ alone, it was Christ plus penance. Or Christ plus good works. Or Christ plus the sacraments.

And everything was for the glory of Rome. Yes, it was for the glory of God. But it was also for the glory of the church. So what happened in the Reformation?

[11:59] Well, Martin Luther studied the Bible. And when he discovered that God's word and the church's word were not the same thing, he cried out, in effect, *Sola Scriptura*.

Scripture alone. If the word of the church contradicts the word of God, who should we consider more authoritative? Obviously, it should be God himself and what he has said to us.

So out of the Reformation comes Scripture alone. The Bible must be our final authority in every matter because Scripture is how God himself speaks to us.

Again, creeds and confessions, the five solas, for example, can be a great benefit to us. And church tradition can teach us many things. God has given us pastors and leaders in the church.

But Scripture alone is our inerrant and infallible authority. And it should have the ultimate say over everything. Now, once the principle of Scripture alone has been established, from that comes a more accurate understanding of the gospel, of salvation.

[13:21] So out of Scripture alone comes grace alone. We are saved by God's grace. Full stop.

We cannot earn our way into heaven. We cannot earn our way out of purgatory if there were such a place. No amount of good deeds or commandment-keeping can outweigh our sin.

If not for God's gracious, unmerited favor, we are without one ounce of hope. Going further, Scripture says we are saved by grace through faith.

Hebrews says, without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith is God's chosen means by which He justifies us, by which He declares us not guilty.

So we come to Him empty-handed, trusting that He alone has the power to save and the willingness to save. But, of course, faith must have an object, right?

[14:22] We must have faith in something or in someone. Plus, God is a just God. He cannot merely sweep our sins under the rug. Justice must be served.

The guilty must be punished. So, the Bible teaches we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. For our sake, God made Him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus is the sole object of our faith. He's the sole object of our hope. And we are trusting that His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to save.

And when we come to understand grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone, through what we learn from Scripture alone, we realize that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

If God's glory isn't at the heart of everything we believe and everything we practice, we're wrong. Somewhere.

[15:41] We have been carried about by some wind of false doctrine. Any teaching that elevates man above God is undoubtedly false and unbiblical.

And I would argue that the five solas, in many respects, distinguish true Christianity from every other religion.

For example, consider so-called liberal Christianity. There are many professing Christians today who reject sola scriptura, Scripture alone.

Some reject at least some of the ethics of Scripture. Some reject Paul's writings outright. Some reject the miracles of the Bible or the literal account of creation in the book of Genesis.

But what happens when we start picking apart the Bible like that? Well, it's kind of like pulling blocks out of a Jenga tower. Eventually, the whole thing just crumbles. It falls over.

[16:43] If one rejects Scripture alone, when you cease to have true Christianity, instead, one creates a religion of his own arbitrary and subjective making.

And it's meaningless. For another example, consider Islam. Muslims. They pay homage to Jesus, right?

As a prophet at least. But they deny faith alone in Christ alone. They believe one must earn eternal life through his or her own righteousness and good works, and Christ plays no part in it at all.

So the five solas, they really do lie at the heart of genuine Christianity. And that's why I say they make such a great framework. Maybe someone isn't ready to read an historic confession like the 1689 confession, but the five solas.

They provide a surprisingly rich foundation for biblical understanding, especially regarding salvation. I like what Gabriel Fleur writes in his book, *The Beauty of Divine Grace*.

[18:00] He says, the five solas offer us the biblical Jesus, the one who was unswervingly committed to the inerrancy and final authority of the Scriptures, the one who taught us that grace alone through faith alone is the only way to salvation, the one who glorified God alone through every minute of his life because he knew that we cannot.

And he goes on to write, this is the Jesus that we need. This is the Jesus that the world needs. We will meet him if only we embrace the five solas.

Now, obviously, I don't have weeks to present to you the five solas in detail, but let's at least spend the remainder of our time looking at each one with a bit more detail, starting with Scripture alone.

In 2 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul writes, all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Now, this is Paul's last letter. Of all the things he could potentially emphasize to a young minister like Timothy before his death, he chooses to stress the importance of God's Word.

[19:33] Why? Because it is the foundation for the Christian life. It's the foundation for the church. It is our ultimate authority over everything we should believe and everything we should do, everything we should practice.

The Bible alone is our highest standard, and it should have the final word on everything. Paul says, all Scripture is breathed out by God.

In other words, every part of the Bible comes directly from God. He is exhaling it to us. He may have used human authors to literally, physically pen the words, but they are God's words, and they convey His perfect and complete message without error.

They are infallible, which means they are incapable of having errors, and they are inerrant, which means they ultimately are free of error. And Jesus affirmed as much when He said to God in prayer, Your Word is truth.

Which word? Every word. The whole thing. It's true. So by trusting the Bible, we are trusting God Himself because these are His words, and His Word is truth.

[20:59] Now, Paul continues by highlighting the practical value of Scripture. He says all Scripture is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The Bible teaches us about God. It reveals our sin. It guides us back to righteousness when we do sin. It helps us to grow in faith and godliness.

It has immense practical value. You see, we live in a world that is full of competing voices and ideas and worldviews, and again, the Bible serves as an anchor, an anchor of truth, if you will.

As we try our best to navigate through this fallen world, God, the Creator of this world, has given us ultimate truth to learn from and to rely on.

As Proverbs 30, verse 5 says, every word of God proves true. So, unsurprisingly, the Bible is also sufficient, providing everything we need in this life for faith, for obedience, for salvation.

[22:12] I mean, we can study a lot of things, literature, math, biology, astronomy, so on. All of these things are good. These things are worth studying.

But Scripture alone reveals and articulates God's will. It reveals the fullness of God's character, namely through Jesus Christ.

And for these reasons, Paul says we are complete, equipped for every good work. We cannot add to it. We cannot improve upon it. We do not need anything else to be complete or to be thoroughly equipped to serve God.

The Bible is sufficient. So, of course, if we truly believe in Scripture alone, here's the practical takeaway, we will study it.

We will study it prayerfully. We will listen to it as it's preached from the pulpit. We will desire to learn from it. and we will submit to it. We will obey it.

[23 : 16] Not because it's some sacred religious text passed down through the generations. Well, it's what my grandfather read, so I suppose I'll read it as well. No, we obey it because it is God's very word.

And we let Him have the say in every matter. So, that's Scripture alone in a nutshell. Let's consider grace alone. Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 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.

There was a news story a few years ago about a boy who got lost in the Colorado Mountains, I think it was. And the boy had no way to rescue himself.

So, he simply sat down where he was and he waited. He waited for someone to come and find him. And they finally did locate him a few days later.

[24 : 20] And after the fact, the rescuers were being interviewed by the media. And one of the rescuers, made the comment that children are always easier to find than adults.

Because when children get lost, they don't try to rescue themselves. For the most part, they just stay where they are and they wait for help. Adults, they try to figure it out on their own and they just usually make matters worse.

Children are much easier to rescue. And I think that's a pretty good illustration of salvation by grace. Paul says, we are like that lost boy.

We're lost in sin. Read the full chapter. We're spiritually dead. We are unable to save ourselves. Therefore, only God's grace can save us.

Now, we typically define grace as God's unmerited favor. But I'm not sure that really captures the fullness of his grace.

[25 : 21] And I say this because we're not morally neutral. It's not as though God is merely giving us a little bit better than what we deserve. No. We deserve his wrath.

We deserve utter condemnation. Gabriel Fleur calls it demerited favor. In other words, God gives us the complete opposite of what we deserve.

Paul emphasizes in Ephesians 2, this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God. And we might say it can only be the gift of God. And to be clear, Jesus is the embodiment of God's grace.

So let's not think of grace as some abstract concept. When we receive grace and salvation, we are receiving Christ himself. grace always comes through Christ in his finished work on the cross.

So grace is very personal. It's not abstract at all. Again, Paul says, for by grace you have been saved through faith. Salvation is entirely God's work.

[26 : 33] Again, read the full chapter. We were dead in sin. We had nothing to contribute. Even the faith by which we receive God's grace is a gift of God.

There's no room for boasting at all. And this teaching of grace stands in stark contrast to every other world religion.

Every other religion teaches some form of salvation by works or salvation through personal merit. But true Christianity, biblical Christianity, flips this entirely on its head.

It says, God saves and then good works follow. Not the other way around. Paul continues, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

Adding anything to grace destroys its very nature. It ceases to be grace. Our good works cannot save us. They are the result of salvation, not a cause of salvation.

[27 : 37] Paul writes in verse 10 of Ephesians 2, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand. Salvation is a gift.

Faith is a gift. Even our good works are a gift. Of course, Paul implies that salvation by grace alone doesn't lead to passivity.

it changes us. True faith produces good works as evidence of God's grace in our lives, but these works flow from gratitude, not obligation.

Ultimately, grace frees us to live for God, to do these good works. And I think in eternity, once we reach heaven, we will marvel at God's grace more than we ever have.

I suspect we will look around and we will see people and think to ourselves, what is He doing here? [28 : 43] What is she doing here? We might finally ask the question if we hadn't already asked it, what am I doing here? I don't deserve to be here.

Well, the answer is going to be the same for everyone. By grace alone. That's why you're here. By grace alone. Well, moving on to faith alone.

Jesus, in Luke 18, He tells the story of a Pharisee and a tax collector who go into the temple to pray.

Luke 18, verses 9 through 14. You probably know the story. The Pharisee, He proudly begins to list his religious deeds.

He thanks God that He's not like others, namely sinners. But the tax collector, He's standing afar off, can't even look up into heaven.

[29 : 43] He's humbly praying, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. And Jesus concluded that parable by saying the tax collector, not the Pharisee, but the tax collector, He went to His house justified.

And that parable shows us that being right with God is not about boasting in our works, it's not about what we've done or not done, but it is simply, humbly, trusting in Him to forgive.

To be justified means to be declared right before God, to be declared righteous before God. And this is not because of our works, but through faith in Christ.

Paul writes, 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. Faith is the means by which we receive God's gift of salvation, not something we earn.

And if that's beginning to sound repetitive, I intend for it to be. It is, faith is a hand that is merely accepting a gift.

[31 : 00] It contributes nothing. It simply receives what Christ has done. That's it. Jesus bore our punishment on the cross.

But the Pharisee, when he goes into the temple, he believed that his good deeds justified him, made him right before God, despite the fact that he knew the Scriptures, and the Scriptures say none is righteous.

No, not one. Only faith in Christ's finished work can make us right with God. But the Pharisee's pride, it blinded him to his sin.

He trusted in himself. He trusted in his own works, fasting, tithing, avoiding, you know, at least the outward appearance of sin. And while those things are good, they could not justify him before a perfect and holy God.

You know, self-righteousness leads us to think that we're better than we are because it leads us to compare ourselves with others. And, you know, we can probably always find someone who seems to be worse off than we are, you know, bigger sinners than we are.

[32 : 10] But that's not how God judges. His standard is one of absolute perfection. And when he evaluates us to that standard or according to that standard, he says, all have fallen short of my glory.

In contrast to the Pharisee, though, the tax collector, he acknowledged his sin. He acknowledged his helplessness.

And that's why he sought God's mercy. And I think this humility truly reflects genuine faith, which recognizes our unworthiness and relies wholly on God's grace.

As the author James says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And salvation is not, as many think, faith plus good deeds.

This is what the Pharisee thought. Trusting in anything other than Christ diminishes the finished work of Christ. Not that it can really diminish it, but it effectively, it practically does.

[33 : 22] Paul warned against this in Galatians 2, saying, if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Faith alone frees us to trust in God's love and His compassion without the fear of failing to measure up.

It says, I know I don't measure up. Knowing our righteousness is in Christ gives us peace and security we could not have otherwise.

And from this foundation, we can serve God joyfully, not to earn His favor, but as a response to His grace. Like the tax collector, we can approach God with humility and be confident in His mercy. He desires to save. Well, our faith needs an object, right? Again, we must put our trust in something or better yet, someone.

Well, here's what Jesus says of Himself in John 14. And I would argue this is one of the most controversial statements in all the Bible. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

[34 : 43] No one comes to the Father except through Me. These words stand at the heart of the Christian faith.

Jesus declares Himself to be the only way to God, not to mention the ultimate truth and the giver of life.

These claims are central to the gospel and indispensable for salvation. Now, in our culture, many people believe you can choose your own path to God and to heaven.

However, Jesus refutes this. There's no denying what He says here. He doesn't point to a path. He says, I am the way to the Father, the one and only way to the Father.

The definite article emphasizes that He is the only way. As Peter boldly preached in Acts chapter 4, there is salvation in no one else.

[35 : 53] None. Now, this exclusivity offended Jesus' original audience. Jewish leaders, they accused Him of blasphemy, proclaiming equality with God, and yet Jesus made it clear and did not back down from saying that no rituals, no works, no religions can reconcile sinners to a holy God.

It is only through His atoning sacrifice on the cross that we can be made right with God. Christ is our only rescue from sin and death. truth. In our world today, so-called truth is often very subjective. You have your truth and I have my truth, which makes no sense at all, but it doesn't stop people from believing it. But Jesus says there is a truth.

There is the truth, and He claims to be that very truth. unlike philosophies or other religions that claim partial truths, Jesus is the complete revelation of God.

He is truth incarnate, if you will. You know, C.S. Lewis famously observed that Jesus' claims about Himself leave no room for Him to be merely a great teacher as some think, or even a prophet as some think, He must be Lord.

[37 : 26] And if He's not Lord, He is either a liar or a lunatic. That's it. Those are your options. Everything about Him, especially His resurrection, confirms that He is, in fact, Lord, the incarnate truth.

Now, one thing's for sure, Christ's claim, it challenges our autonomy, doesn't it? Our culture idolizes self-rule.

You know, was it the poet William Henley who said, I'm the master of my fate? Yet, this autonomy doesn't seem to be helping anyone. Look at social media.

Look at the news. we see a lot of people that are fragmented, unfulfilled, desperate for something that they can't seem to find.

I believe true freedom and true purpose comes only when we submit to Christ, the one and the only one who can reconcile us to God.

[38 : 40] And He grounds us in unchanging truth about everything, God, ourselves, the world around us. He makes sense of life because He is the truth.

Well, Jesus also says, I am the life. Again, He alone offers eternal life. And not just in the future, but even now.

Through faith, we receive His Spirit who indwells and transforms us. And this Spirit-filled life provides peace, it provides joy, it provides understanding, it provides purpose.

even in the face of life's hardships. Without Christ, life is utterly meaningless. Careers, relationships, even these moral causes that people take up in our society today, nothing, and we see the evidence all around us, nothing can satisfy our deepest longings.

It is only through Christ that we find true an eternal life, not to mention meaning and purpose. Of course, Jesus' exclusive claim in John 14, 6 demands a response, doesn't it?

[40 : 04] He is the only way to God, the ultimate truth, the giver of eternal life, so the question that confronts us always is, will we submit to Him and find salvation in Christ alone?

as S.M. Lockridge said, you can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

Romans 11, 36, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen. That statement captures the ultimate purpose of all creation, which is God's glory.

Yet, we do live in a culture that exalts man and diminishes God constantly. Modern philosophies prefer to emphasize that human autonomy, to deny the Creator, reducing life to this meaningless existence.

And I think even we as Christians can sometimes become so busy and distracted by other things that we fail to see, we fail to remember, we fail to live for God's glory.

[41 : 19] Well, Paul reminds us that everything is from God and through God and for God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all. Nothing exists apart from Him and all things find purpose in glorifying Him.

And when we lose sight of this, we effectively exchange God's glory for idols, for something far less, as Romans 1 tells us. I think our modern distractions, everything from social media to consumerism or whatever it is, kind of reveals our tendency for seeking glory for ourselves rather than reflecting it back to God.

You see, we're conditioned to avoid deep, meaningful engagement, whether with relationships or in work or even with God Himself. Instead, we chase all kinds of what we might call fleeting glories and they leave us feeling anxious and unsatisfied so we have addiction and we have death and we have all kinds of problems in our society that show the consequences of this purposeless existence. our purpose, the reason we're here, the reason God made us is simply this, to glorify Him. That's why we're here and that's where we find our ultimate satisfaction.

Always. I like how C.S. Lewis illustrates this in his book Prince Caspian when Lucy notices that Aslan, the lion Christ figure in the book, has grown bigger.

[43 : 06] Aslan says, every year you grow, you will find me bigger. The more we grow in faith and in our knowledge of God and of Christ, the more glorious He becomes in our eyes.

And our calling is, of course, to magnify His glory through our lives. Proclaiming His worth to a watching world. So, of course, we should reject the meaninglessness of our culture and embrace the eternal weight of God's glory, living completely, wholeheartedly for His glory.

And that is a very condensed version of the five solas of the Reformation. We're dismissed. Thank you. Thank you. For the seventh stretch saya, from the eighthrea to serve of the?, we're dismissed.