

Five Solas: to the Glory of God alone

Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and glory to God alone – called the Five Solas - is a helpful summary for knowing God and ourselves (“sola” means “only” in Latin).

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come before him!
Worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth;
yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.

- 1 Chronicles 16:28-30

Towards one unchangeable goal: the glory of God

In many ways, the first four *solas* – *Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone* – find their natural completion in this: *Glory to God alone*. The Hebrew word for “glory” has to do with “weight” or “heaviness.” In the verses above, when King David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he understood that worship was must extend beyond Israel’s borders to all people on earth.

In one sense, God’s glory is *limited* by us, because we cannot give Him the glory that He is due. And yet, His glory is *unlimited*, because it is all that He is – and that is beyond our comprehension! All of history is arcing towards the goal of glorifying God. The day is coming when, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).”

It is clear that only God should be worshipped – and only He is truly worthy of praise. In a passage of the Bible that speaks of God freeing His people from captivity, the LORD declares: “My glory I will not give to another (Isaiah 48:11).” When John the disciple mistakenly “fell down to worship at the feet of the angel” who had showed him the visions, he said, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).”

The perfections of God - *His goodness, love, holiness, mercy, justice, power* - mean that He must always act for His glory, and wonderfully, in Christ Jesus, this is woven together with our greatest good. When the Westminster Shorter Catechism (107 questions and answers) was published in 1647, the authors recognised this, and so began by asking:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

May we never ever tire of hearing that answer! It encapsulates life’s purpose in one memorable sentence. When Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) thought of this, he said: “The end of the creation is that the creation might glorify Him. Now what is glorifying but a rejoicing at that glory He has displayed?” The purpose of life is not merely to understand *about* God, nor to *tell* of His glory, but to actually delight in Him ourselves.

The cross glorifies God

The cross of Christ Jesus, and not only His resurrection, was for God’s glory. As the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem for the final time before His death, He said: ““Now is my soul troubled.

And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again (John 12:27-28)."" This was one of only three occasions that the Father spoke audibly in the Gospels (see Luke 3:22; 9:35).

Then, on the eve of His death, after Judas had left the Upper Room, the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once (John 13:31-32)." God was glorified *through* the cross of Jesus. For us, the cross judges us as to where we stand before God, yet, amazingly, it is also our pathway into the glory of God.

Through the vocation of the milkmaid

Often when we think of worship, our minds go to our preferences. Yet surely, when we stand in the light of God's glory, such trivial things will melt away. Historically, reformed churches have recognised that God should be worshipped only as He said that He should be worshipped in His Word, and not by human inventions of worship (Matt. 15:9). There is much to be said for the Puritan principle of simplicity of worship. We glorify God by gathering to sing His praise, hear His Word, pray to Him, and encourage others. We glorify God by our faith, simply and earnestly lived out.

Beware: we must never partition our lives, such that God is a part of our lives. He is over all, which means that every sphere must resound with His glory. Even the most mundane things of life can be made to hum with His praise. As Martiin Luther said: "God is milking the cows through the vocation of the milkmaid." Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) often began his musical compositions with the initials "J.J." – short for "Jesus, help." And he often ended them with "*Soli Deo Gloria*" – "glory to God alone."

The necessary order

If our aim is to reform all of life to the glory of God - even if it happens little by little - then we must realise that such a goal can only come through a re-discovery of God's Word. The necessary order is: Revival of God's Word leading to reform in our lives and society. When God's people returned to the Land after the seventy-year exile, despite a promising beginning, the work on the temple came to a standstill for more than fifteen years, until in 520 B.C. there was a revival of God's Word through the prophets, leading to a revival of the work (see Ezra 4:24-5:2). The order could not have been reversed.

Significantly, God has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" – that is, everything to glorify Him – through what He has revealed about Himself (2 Peter 1:3-4). Nothing that a believer needs to honour God's name is held back from us.

An unproductive activity

Worship is an unproductive use of time, until it is measured against the standard of God's glory. If it is true that written into the being of who we are is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, then the most important words that we hear each week are, "Come, let's worship God."

*Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together!*
- Psalm 34:3