

Five Solas

And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you
ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and
nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests
to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

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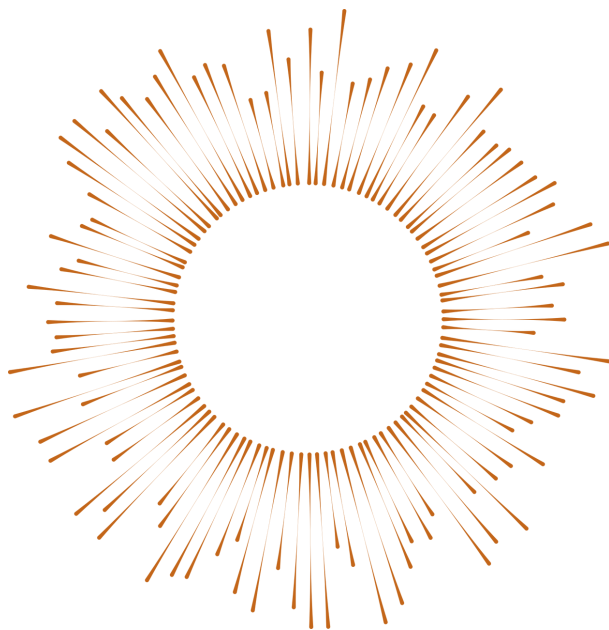
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Introduction

Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and glory to God alone – called the Five Solas - are a helpful summary for knowing God and ourselves. "Sola" means "alone" in Latin.

Where the medieval church had steered a poor course, the rediscovery of these five doctrines during the Reformation of the sixteenth century, helped to correct her.

May the church always be reforming closer to God's Word.



Scripture alone

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.

- Psalm 119:105

True Light

We have all had the disorientating experience of trying to follow a path in dim or distorted light. The verse above states that God's Word is light to our path. That presupposes that God is communicative – and His desire is for us to know Him truly. Additionally, it presupposes that His Word is clear, undistorted light. Light implies precision and clarity. Our confidence is that, ultimately, God's Word speaks the plain truth plainly.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says that whilst "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all," those things that are "necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation" are clear (WCF 1.7).

Unique

The Bible is unique. Most books have a single author, and were written during a single point in time, but the Bible comprises sixty-six smaller books, written by a variety of people, over more than a millennium. Amongst its authors are kings and princes (Moses, David and Solomon), fishermen (John and Peter), a shepherd (Amos), a tax collector (Matthew) and a Greek physician (Luke). Yet, overarching this is the truth that the Bible is also a single book with one divine Author behind it. It truly is “breathed-out” by Him (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

The main difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is where they stand in relation to Christ Jesus. The Old Testament saints looked forward to His coming. Whilst the New Testament, looks back to what He has done and all that this means for the present and future.

Scripture alone (or *sola Scriptura*) means that although reason will help guide us, and history can be a good friend, it is God’s Word that gives

us the light that we need to know God, ourselves and the world. It is inerrant and true.

Martin Luther

On the 18th April 1521, Martin Luther was called before the Diet of Worms (a formal assembly called by the Holy Roman Empire in the city of Worms). He was pressured to recant from his criticism of the Church, however he replied,

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I consider myself convicted by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. [Possibly he added: Here I stand; I can do no other] God help me. Amen.

The Word's power

In Mark 4, the Lord Jesus told a series of parables about God's Word and the Kingdom of God. He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how (Mark 4:26-27)." God works through the light of His Word to grow His kingdom in His way. Thank God, for if it depended upon us then we would try to control, commercialise and commodity His kingdom – but God marvellously works in His authentic way. Again, Luther said, "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing... I did nothing; the Word did everything."

God's Word reflects His character

God's Word reflects His character, and so here are some conclusions that we can draw about the Bible;

- **Eternal**- the Bible never 'grows old.' It speaks afresh to each generation. We are like grass

which withers in time, but “the word of the Lord remains forever (1 Peter 1:14).”

- **Trustworthy-** God’s Word is without error, or inerrant. Whilst the accounts, for example, of the resurrection of Jesus must be harmonised, they individually give a true record of what occurred.
- **Sufficient-** God’s Word is sufficient for faith and life. This doesn’t mean that it reveals everything that could possibly be known about God. God is an inexhaustible person! (Deut. 29:29; John 21:25; 1 Cor.13:12) Yet, it does reveal all about God that we *need* to know this side of heaven.
- **Clear-** although some things in Scripture are difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:16), all that needs to be clear is clear. The rule “Scripture interprets Scripture” is helpful.
- **Christ-centred-** Ultimately, the Bible is about God. It reveals who He is and who we are in light of Him. The Bible points us to the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14).

Again, Luther said of the Scriptures that, “Out and out, all and everything is believed or nothing is believed. The Holy Ghost doesn’t let Himself be divided or partitioned, so that He lets one part be taught and believed correctly and the other falsely.”

A Church of Replacements?

When God’s word is rejected then it must be replaced with other things. Inevitably, these things become embarrassing, trivial and sinful man-made idols when compared to the riches of God’s Word. Often vestments, or platitudes, or rituals can replace true preaching of God’s Word. But without the Word, there can be nothing of the glory of the Father, the power of the cross to forgive, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. What light on the path is there?

If the Bible is God’s Word, then it must describe what is best for humanity, such that all other alternatives will, ultimately, harm us. Therefore, we ought never to be embarrassed by it.

An appetite for God's Word

The Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) said, "The Bible is the only measuring stick for the truth. Where, then, you notice that I have not been quite correct in my interpretation, lay my commentary aside and follow the Bible."

May we come with a true desire to know God with an appetite for His Word: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation (1 Pet. 2:2)." May we heed the gracious call of the Scriptures:

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

- Psalm 34:8

Questions and Answers

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and 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."

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

How were the books of the New Testament originally written?

Writing in the ancient world was more difficult and expensive than it is today. Whilst some New Testament writers may have written for themselves (see 2 Thess. 3:17), it was common for a secretary to write down their dictated words. For example, at the end of Paul's letter to the Romans it reads, "I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you (Rom. 16:22)."

The books of the New Testament books were likely written on papyrus scrolls originally. Papyrus is a reed that grew in various parts of the Mediterranean, especially the Nile delta (the pith of the plant was called *biblos*, from which we get *bibliography* and *Bible*). Sheets of woven papyrus could be glued together to form a scroll. The longest scrolls were approximately 9-10 metres long; enough for the longest New Testament books to be written on. Reed pens with ink were used for writing. It

was only in the century after the New Testament was written that books (called *codex*) started to replace scrolls, with Christians being quick to take up this new technology.

How were duplicate copies of the New Testament books made?

None of the original manuscripts (*autographs*) of the various New Testament books have survived until today. Presumably, they have perished. In the ancient world there was no way of duplicating documents, except slowly and painstakingly by hand (printing presses didn't become widely used in the West for the Bible until the fifteenth century).

What ancient manuscripts of the Bible have been found today?

Ancient manuscripts are rare. As an example, in A.D. 116 the Roman historian Tacitus wrote a history of the Roman Empire called *Annals of Imperial Rome*. Yet, today the earliest

manuscript for this work is a copy from the ninth century A.D., now kept in a library in Florence. The earliest fragments of Homer's *Iliad*, written in the eighth century B.C., date to third century B.C., with the earliest complete manuscript dating to the tenth century A.D.

By comparison, there are approximately 5800 Greek manuscripts for the New Testament.

Additionally, there are thousands of translations into Coptic, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopic and other languages. Whilst the vast majority of these manuscripts were copied over five years after Jesus, there are many earlier manuscripts - in fact, far more than for any other ancient piece of writing.

The earliest fragment of the New Testament which is considered to have survived until today is called "*P*⁵²." It is commonly dated to A.D. 125, or within about thirty years of when the last of the New Testament books was written (it is

on display in Manchester, UK). This small piece of papyrus has John 18:31-33 on one side and verses 37-38 on the opposite side. Having writing on both sides means that it was probably part of a book, not a scroll (although see Rev. 5:1).

Another important manuscript available today is called *Codex Sinaiticus* ("book of Sinai"). It was copied approximately 350 A.D. and is considered to be the oldest complete copy of the New Testament. It was discovered in 1844 in a monastery on Mount Sinai and is now kept in the British Museum. It was written on vellum parchment (tanned skins), which are more durable than papyrus. Over 300 calves and sheep were used to produce this one Bible.



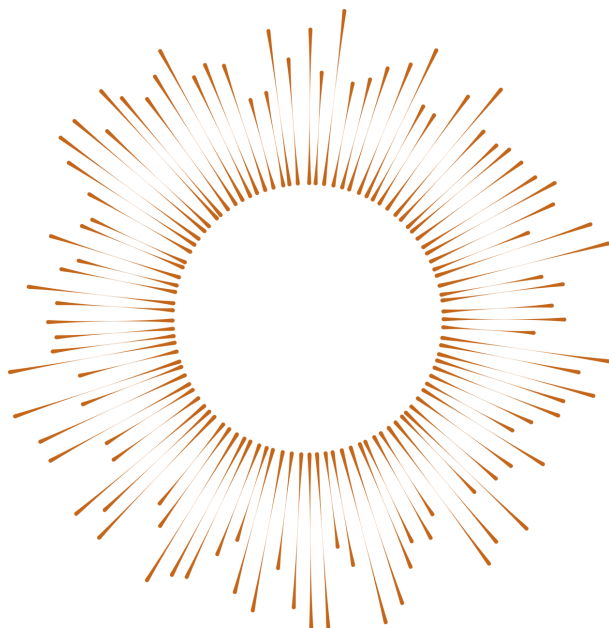
P⁵² at John Rylands Library, Manchester, UK. 8.9 cm × 6.4 cm; it contains part of John 18:31-33 on one side, and John 18:37-38 on the other side

What manuscripts are used when the New Testament is translated into English?

As more and more copies of the New Testament were made, it is only natural that the number of variations between the copies increased. No two ancient manuscripts are identical, and it would be a nearly impossible task to create an identical copy without a copying machine. There are some major variations in the manuscripts, such as Mark's ending (see Mark 16:9-20). Usually, these involve verses being included or excluded from manuscripts, and all good translations will include footnotes noting these. However, most of the variations are the result of minor differences in word order, or spelling (e.g. *John* is spelt with a double *n* in one manuscript), and other insignificant changes in grammar or word order etc. There is an example of variation in 2 Timothy 3:14 where Paul says, "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it."

Some manuscripts have “whom” as singular (probably referring to Paul himself), whilst some manuscripts have “whom” as a plural (probably referring to Paul, Timothy’s mother and grandmother). A good translation assesses each of the thousands of manuscripts before deciding on the most accurate word or phrase to give.

Obviously, some translations of the Bible are better than others, yet we trust that as God oversees the task of translation we can be sure that what we hold in front of us is the Word of God.



Christ alone

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man: Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

- 1 Timothy 2:5-6

One mediator

A mediator heals a breach between two people. Sometimes this is via compromise. We have all had times when we have had to make concessions for the sake of peace, and the Proverbs say that it is to our glory to "overlook an offense (Prov. 19:11)."

Christ heals the breach that we have caused with God by being our mediator. He does this without any compromise that would lessen God's holiness.

He gave Himself as the intermediary between God and us, so that the result is reconciliation, and the absence of hostility.

Christ, as our mediator, maintains the integrity of God, so that He truly is holy – and in Christ, God’s love for us is unbreakable.

What do we contribute?

Each of the five *solas* was developed in response to error or incorrect teaching within the Church, and yet their truths are for every generation. In the case of *Solus Christus*, or ‘Christ alone,’ the error was not over *who* Christ Jesus is, but over *what* He achieved in His life, death and resurrection. In the West, many medieval churches had come to teach a system of works, so that a person was given righteousness through following rituals and duties that supplemented what Christ had done at the cross. In this way, people were tethered to the Church - and their own performance in the Church’s eyes - in order to receive grace enough to save.

But this raises the question: what do we, or anyone else for that matter – such as saints or angels - contribute to our salvation? Does Christ mostly save us and we must do the rest? Or are

His life, death and resurrection everything that we need to be perfectly and forever reconciled with God?

In 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism, question 29, asked and answered that question by saying;

Question: Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "saviour"?

Answer: Because he saves us from our sins; and because salvation is not to be sought or found in anyone else.

What does God require of us?

All of this presupposes that God requires something of us, which we have not fulfilled. God as our Creator made us to live by His laws. We owe Him obedience as a matter of right, whilst also understanding that God's laws are for our best.

The problem with this is that whilst God's law is good, it doesn't have any power in and of itself to make us good people in right standing with God. In fact, like a mirror, God's perfect law shows up the ugliness of our sin. In Romans 3:20,

Paul says that the law cannot set us free, "since through the law comes knowledge of sin." This is the first step in leading us to Christ as Saviour. Martin Luther summarized it this way: "The law discovers the disease. The gospel gives the remedy."

Luther's stairs

In 1510, Luther was a zealous monk who travelled from Erfurt, Germany, across the Alps, to Rome, Italy. He visited the *Scala Sancta*, or holy stairs – twenty-eight white marble stairs that are thought to be the steps that the Lord Jesus climbed on his trial before Pontius Pilate. The mother of the emperor Constantine had relocated the stairs from Jerusalem to Rome in 326 A.D.

Luther ascended the stairs on his knees, reciting the Lord's Prayer on each step. He had been taught that by doing so he would receive from dead saints some of their good merits, which could reduce the time spent in purgatory by his loved ones. But when he reached the top he said, "Who knows whether this works?" Later,

Luther confessed, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, it was I." Yet, he was beginning to realise that the best efforts were not enough.

He returned to Erfurt in despair. In God's kindness, he soon began to understand from the Scriptures that Christ had achieved all that is necessary for reconciliation with God, and to trust *other* ways was, in fact, unbelief. He would later say, "The cross alone is our theology."

No one else could achieve what Christ achieved

What did Christ achieve? In Revelation 5, the Apostle John saw a vision that left him weeping. A challenge was issued to all of creation: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" That is, can anyone unlock the promises and judgments of God, ultimately to reconcile God with sinful humanity? John wept because the situation looked helpless. Nobody could be found. But then, John is told, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals (Rev.5:5)." Christ

Jesus alone could bring eternal peace and reconciliation with God.

Christ's achievement

In Ephesians 1:7-8, Paul sets out what Christ Jesus achieved for us clearly: "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, in all wisdom and insight." The whole of our redemption and forgiveness is due to Him. He does not half redeem or half save, but He has wholly brought us into God's family through Christ (Eph. 1:5). One of the best ways of understanding what Christ Jesus has done is through the Biblical pictures of prophet, priest and king;

Prophet: as our prophet, Christ spoke God's Word. In the past, God spoke through prophets, but now He has spoken through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). The Holy Spirit continues to make us wholly willing to listen.

Priest: as our priest, Christ intercedes to God for us. In fact, He is both sacrifice and priest, satisfying the demands of justice completely by His death on the cross. He now lives and actively intercedes for us before God the Father.

King: as our king, Christ inherits the promises God gave to David of a kingdom that would never end. Christ rules universally and sovereignly, never to be toppled.

In a letter to a fellow monk on 7th April, 1516, Luther was starting to grasp *Christ alone*. He wrote, "Brother George... at present, the temptation to rest in one's own works is very powerful, especially with those who long to be good and pious. They are ignorant of God's righteousness, which has been so richly bestowed on us in Christ without money and price... But they never get thus far... Therefore, dear brother, learn Christ and Him crucified. Praise and laud His name, and despairing of self,

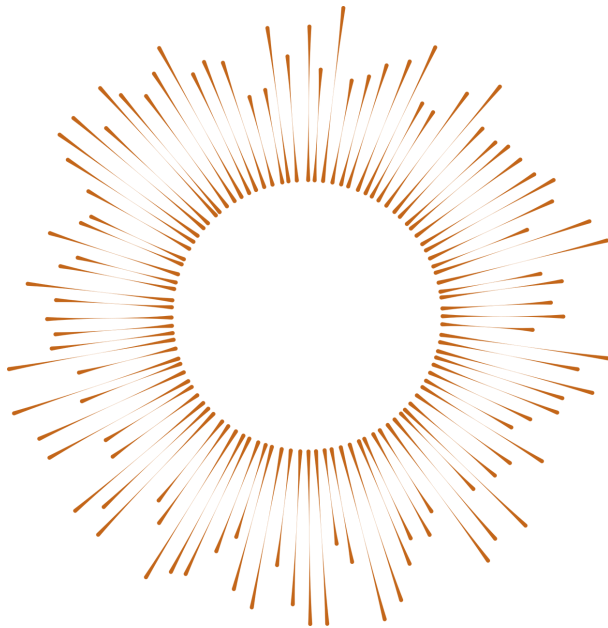
say to Him, "Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness, but I am Thy sin. Thou hast taken what is mine, and given me what is Thine. Thou hast assumed that which Thou wert not, and given me what I had not." "

No place for boasting

We contribute nothing to our salvation, but our sin and sinfulness. Christ has done it all. Hence, there is no place for boasting before God or others. We rightly sing;

*When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.*

- Isaac Watts



Faith alone

... yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

- Galatians 2:16

Justified through faith

The key word in Galatians 2:16, appearing three times, is "justified." It is a term from the law courts. Biblically, it means to be found in the right before God, free of charges. It is "to be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous."

This definition of justification broke sharply with what many in the medieval church – as well as today - taught about justification. They taught that through a system of penance, receiving the sacraments and good works, a person could be made righteous before God.

Yet in 1530, the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church, declared that nobody can “be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favour, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins (Art. IV).”

In the same year, whilst defending his German translation of Romans 3:28, where he added the word “alone” after the word “faith,” Martin Luther said, “Paul's words are too strong – they allow no works, none at all! Now if it is not works, it must be faith alone.” In many ways, Luther saw this as the chief doctrine on which the church would stand or fall.

Smoke in our hands

Often, we think that doing ‘right’ things, such as saying the sinner’s prayer, being baptised, reading our Bibles daily, giving to the poor, praying earnestly, trying our best or joining a

church, will mean that we are saved, but that is wrong.

The sole cause of us being right with God is the righteousness of Christ given, or *imputed*, to us. It is received by faith, and *not* by faith plus something else.

We should realise that rightly speaking nobody is justified by faith, but we are justified by Christ Jesus *through* faith. As B.B. Warfield explained: "The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or in the nature of faith, but in the object of faith." Christ alone saves, and faith is the way by which we belong to Him. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Westminster confession declares: "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification (WCF 11.2)."

Therefore, John Calvin said, "Let us come [to God] empty handed, for whatever we bring to him will be like smoke in our hands." If ever we

think that we are saved by our own works, then we twist God's grace and forfeit assurance. Faith alone safeguards God alone as our saviour.

But is this what the Old Testament teaches?

In Romans 4, the Apostle Paul shows that the father of the Jewish people, Abraham, was *not* saved by his own works. Citing Genesis 15:6, he says, "For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." "

Paul then gives an illustration from everyday life: "Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (Rom. 4:3-5)."

Amazingly, Paul goes on to say that Abraham is even the father of Gentiles who believe (v.11).

What is true faith?

This raises the question of how to define faith. Is it merely agreeing to certain statements? Is it a feeling? We must heed the warnings of a false

faith for many vainly deceive themselves that they are right with God. One of the clearest definitions of faith comes from the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), question 21;

Question: What is true faith?

Answer: It is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word; but also a hearty trust, which the Holy Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, for the sake of Christ's merits.

Yet faith never comes alone

Yet James says, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:14-17)." That is, if a person claims to have faith, yet shows no fruit of obedience whatsoever, then it is dead faith, as true faith must bear fruit. In this way, God's work doesn't

stop at justification, but continues with sanctification – or else His work within us is not genuine.

John Wesley (1703-1791) explained it in this way: “We are, doubtless, justified by faith. This is the corner-stone of the whole Christian building. We are justified without the works of the law, as any previous condition of justification; but they are an immediate fruit of that faith whereby we are justified. So that if good works do not follow our faith, even all inward and outward holiness, it is plain our faith is nothing worth; we are yet in our sins.” Good works *show* that a person is a Christian, but they do not *make* a person a Christian.

The wonder of the gospel

When Luther first understood that “The righteous shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17)” and that righteousness is found in Christ, he felt like “a new man; I entered through open doors into the very paradise of God.”

The wonderful truth of the gospel is that from the moment that we first believe, we are never

more justified or less justified, but we are as perfectly justified as Christ Jesus eternally is. The newest believer stands as justified as the oldest believer.

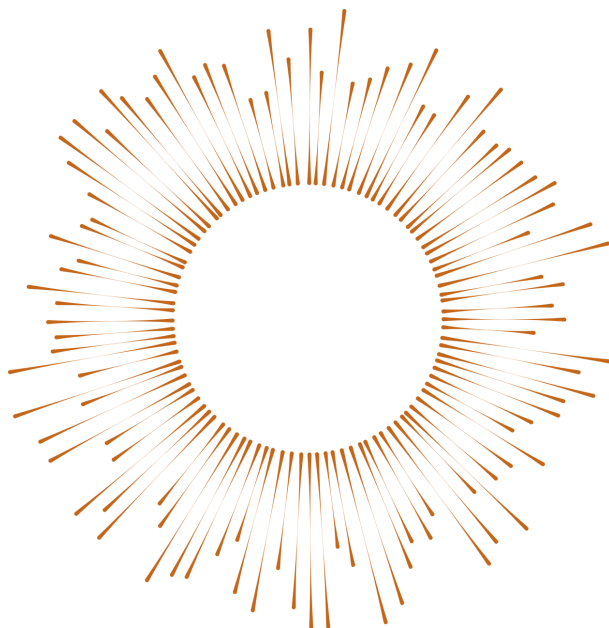
William Cowper (1731-1800), for all his struggles in his life, wrote in his hymn *There is a fountain filled with blood* the following words,

*O Lamb of God, Your precious blood
shall never lose its power,
till all the ransomed church of God
is saved, to sin no more;
is saved, to sin no more;
is saved, to sin no more;
till all the ransomed church of God
is saved, to sin no more.*

*And since, by faith, I saw the stream
Your flowing wounds supply,
redeeming love has been my theme,
and shall be till I die;
and shall be till I die;
and shall be till I die;*

*redeeming love has been my theme,
and shall be till I die.*

Our assurance, likewise, is not in our faith, or else we will like a ship adrift every time we experience a storm in life. Our assurance must be in Christ – with faith being the way that we receive Him.



Grace alone

The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers...

- Deuteronomy 7:6-8

It is because the LORD loves

In order to understand the *solas* we must realise that *Christ alone*, *faith alone* and *grace alone* are like three strands of a single rope. They bind together so tightly that to unravel any of them would undo them all.

Grace alone refers to God taking us from being in Adam to being in Christ, thereby justifying us and adopting us into His family. We didn't cooperate with God on this – otherwise

this would not be grace – but from the riches of His free, unmerited kindness, He has done it.

Unfolding covenants of grace

The Bible unfolds in a series of covenants between God and His people, such that He always relates to His people through covenants. Generally, in a covenant there are two parties, promises, conditions and penalties. In Genesis, the word “covenant” is not used (although see Hosea 6:7), yet God had promised blessing to Adam and Eve conditional on their obedience to Him. Thus, it was a Covenant of Works.

Sadly, they broke the covenant. Despite this, God did not abandon humanity, and throughout history He has made further covenants with His people, such as through Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Each of these successive covenants was on the basis of His grace, until the final covenant, or New Covenant, in Christ Jesus, His Son, whereby He freely offers to sinners life and salvation, and gives the seal of His Spirit upon them.

The love of God creates; not responds

Another way of describing God's covenant of grace is according to love. In fact, in the verses above, Moses explains to Israel that God did not set His love upon them because of anything within themselves, but He loved them because He loved them, and had promised to bless them. In 1518, Martin Luther wrote twenty-eight statements for the Heidelberg Disputation. The final one stated:

The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

In contrast to human love which reacts, God's love creates or initiates. We don't do something that triggers off the love of God for us, because all that we bring to Him is the muddiness of our sin. In this way, grace is truly grace, and not conditional.

God's grace is received through faith in all that Christ Jesus is, and has done.

Remove the stone heart; give a heart of flesh

The impossible nature of grace is seen in Ezekiel 36. There, God promises to do what we could never do for ourselves, nor nobody else could ever do for us: remove our natural heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh (v.26).

In addition, He promises to “sprinkle clean water on you” and cleanse from all uncleanness (v.25), and put His Spirit with us (v.27). Such radical work could only ever be grounded in His grace.

The fresh air of grace

In many ways, grace is unfair, and therefore it often offends. In the Lord Jesus’ parable, *the Labourers in the Vineyard*, in Matthew 20:1-16, some of the worker begrudged the Master His goodness towards some of the other workers.

Such a response reveals a legalistic heart. We naturally think that we must do something to earn God’s favour, but legalistic thinking is stifling, twisting the character of God. The symptoms of legalism can be different in different people, ranging from a proud

superiority to a brow-beaten defeatism. Yet, either way, the heart of the problem is the same: God will accept me, or not accept me, based upon my performance or having done certain things.

The grace of God in Christ Jesus frees us from such bondage, breathing fresh air into our souls. As Paul makes abundantly clear: “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 (Eph. 2:8-9).”

Grace undercuts pride

It ought to be obvious that grace undercuts pride. What place can there be for arrogance or boasting before God, or others? Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will* in 1525 in which he said:

God has promised his grace, with certainty, to the humbled... a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he knows that his salvation lies altogether beyond and out of the reach of his own strength, counsels, desires, will, and works: till he depends

absolutely upon the counsel, will, and work of another — that is, of God only.

Grace from first to last

John Newton understood this:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!*

Additionally, he was right to say that God's grace not only brings us to faith in Christ, but His grace then grows us to become more like Christ:

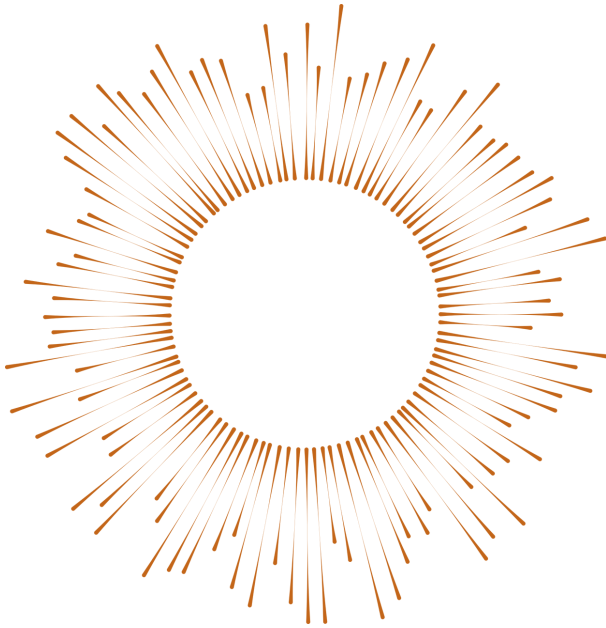
*That grace first taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.*

Titus 2:11-12 explains further how the grace of God also instructs: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age."

In this way, we need never fear God's grace, for such is His power and goodness that grace leads to obedience and holiness, and properly understood, never to more sin.

In fact, God's ongoing grace is the only guarantee that we will ever continue in the Christian life. Again, Newton was right to see that His grace sustains us every day, until we will see Christ face-to-face in heaven:

*His grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.*



Glory to God alone

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 pinnacle 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. It is astounding to realise that Jesus' last act before leaving the Upper Room and heading to the Garden of Gethsemane and His arrest, was to sing a hymn (Matt. 26:30). Possibly, it was Psalm 118 – one of the *Hallel Psalms* sung at this time, with its closing refrain,

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is
good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!”

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.”