

The Pillars of Reformation teaching - The Five Solas

As the protest took shape in the 16th Century, the issues became more and more clearly defined. When the Reformers sought to clarify the main tenants of the Protest, they developed a few phrases or slogans to point to the main theological issues that were at stake. These became known as the “*five solas*.” The Latin word “*sola*” is translated “*only*” or “*alone*” in English. The “*five solas*” articulated five fundamental beliefs of the Protestant Reformation in **contrast** to those of the Roman Church to which they were protesting. These five summarized what they saw as the fundamental principles of Christian life and faith.

The Five “*Solas*” of the Protestant Reformation

Sola Scriptura Scripture Alone	Scripture <u>ONLY</u> is the final rule of Christian life, faith and practice. It is clear, sufficient and self-interpreting.
Sola Christus Christ Alone	Christ is the <u>ONLY</u> mediator between God and man. Christ’s person and work alone are <u>sufficient</u> to save.
Sola Gratia Grace Alone	God’s grace <u>ONLY</u> is the origin of salvation. All elements of salvation are an unmerited gift from God.
Sola Fide Faith Alone	The <u>ONLY</u> means of Justification is <u>faith</u> , apart from works of the Law. Faith <u>alone</u> appropriates salvation.
Soli Deo Gloria God’s Glory Alone	To God <u>ONLY</u> belongs the glory for salvation. This alone is to be our <u>motivation</u> for life and worship.

Not only did these five fundamental principles summarize the Reformation protest, but they also clearly define the fundamental principles of salvation and Christian faith. These clearly summarize the Gospel message and point to the heart of the issues at stake in the Gospel. This happened because the Roman Church had over a long period of time moved away from the Gospel and the person and work of Christ was no longer central to the life and practice of the Church. This resulted in the pompous display of man-made religion, with all of its rites and traditions, which religion the Reformers were formally protesting. The result theologically was a clarification of the main tenants of the Christian Faith and a renewed focus on the heart of the Gospel message, the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Sola Scriptura – The Scripture alone is the final rule of Christian life, faith and practice. It is clear and self-interpreting. The issue here of course was in *contrast* to the Roman teaching that the Church (tradition and the fathers) was the final authority of faith and practice. More than this, they taught that only the Church and the Priesthood could rightly interpret the Scripture because it was inaccessible to the common man. Sola Scriptura clearly meant that not only was the Scripture (not the Church), the final rule of faith and practice, but that it could be understood by the common man (not only a special priesthood) because it was clear (perspicuous) and understandable because the Holy Spirit could interpret the meaning to each believer. Not only this but Sola Scriptura also meant that the Bible was a “***complete***” revelation of God, in its closed “***canon***,” and that it was “***sufficient***” to address all matters in Christian life and to explain to us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

Sola Christus – Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Christ’s person and work alone are sufficient to save. More than this, Jesus Christ is the only “*incarnate*” self-revelation of God who has come and explained God to us. He is the “*object of faith*” and the focal point of all of human history. This of course was in *contrast* to the special priesthood of the Roman Church and the teaching that only the Church could explain or reveal God to the people. Christ Himself, His person and His work ONLY have sufficient merit to “*justify*” us before God and provide a “*righteousness*” (Rom 3:21-24) for us (not our own, Phil 3:9) that is complete in the sight of God. His life and death are the basis on which the believer is justified (it cannot be merited by good works, Eph 2:8-9), and this is absolutely necessary in the sight of God (John 14:6), being the only sufficient grounds for justification by God. Christ and His teaching are the only way to God, the only true revelation of God in history, and the only Redeemer of mankind.

Sola Gratia – God’s grace only is the origin of salvation. All elements of salvation are an unmerited gift from God. God is the One who has reconciled us to Himself, having planned, purchased and applied (Trinity implied) salvation to each individual believer. He is the One who predestines, calls, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies. In short, salvation is wholly the work of God, from first to last, its origin and completion is His work. Therefore, salvation is “not merited” by any work of man nor can it be, in any sense, merited by anything we can do. This of course was in *contrast* to the Roman teaching of Merit, Indulgences, Purgatory and the like. We cannot work for or buy salvation, nor can we suffer long enough in Purgatory in order to purge sin from us. Rather, salvation is the “*free gift*” (Rom 6:23) of God, “*not of works*” (Eph 2:9), and justification is a “*gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 3:24).

Sola Fide – The only means of Justification is faith, apart from works of the Law. Faith alone appropriates salvation. This of course was in *contrast* to the Roman teaching that justification is complete only after we have become righteous in our own persons, through faith AND perseverance in good works to the end of life. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation cannot be earned or merited in any way by people (Eph 2:8-9), but that it is a free gift from God’s good pleasure (Rom 5:16-17) to give it. Further that Christ’s righteousness alone is sufficient as merit before God in order to justify a person, being the only Redeemer (Eph 1:7) and full payment for sin and Provider of righteousness having fulfilled the Law in His perfect life (Rom 10:4). Therefore, Justification, indeed reconciliation to God can only be appropriated to us by faith alone (Rom 5:1), which object is Christ alone (Rom 5:9), and this comes as a gift by God’s grace (Rom 3:24) alone to us. There is no other means of justification but faith (Rom 3:28), and this is “*apart from the works of the Law.*”

Soli Deo Gloria - To God only belongs the glory for salvation. This alone is to be our motivation for life and worship. Because salvation is wholly the work of God, from first to last, it is to God alone that glory and worship is to be given (Rom 11:36). This is in *contrast* of course to the Roman teaching of Papal exaltation, and the veneration of Mary and the Saints. Salvation is something God gives as a free gift and He is to be acknowledged as the sole provider of it. The exaltation of people, even the best of saints, is a diabolical form of idolatry which is wrongfully robbing God’s glory from Him (Rev 19:10, 22:8-9). Rather, if someone is a great saint, we should rightly be thankful for their good service in the Church, but God alone is to be glorified and venerated for working such grace in that saint. Moreover, the only right motive for worship, service and good works is in fact to glorify God (Matt 5:16) so that in our worship of God people might see Him (Phil 2:15-16) and His glory and virtue would shine through our life as a witness (1 Pet 2:9) to God’s good virtue, which is in us only because of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).