



**POST TENEBRAS LUX
AFTER DARKNESS LIGHT**

A Reformation Season Companion

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POST TENEBRAS LUX AFTER DARKNESS LIGHT

A Reformation Season Companion



**GRACE
BAPTIST
CHURCH**

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Introduction

As we look back on the monumental period in church history known as the *Reformation*, it is helpful to define the key beliefs that continue to describe *reformational* churches today. As a Baptist church, Grace Baptist does not align with the Reformed denominations in areas of baptism, church structure, and eschatology, but we do stand with them in the foundational doctrines that continue to unite all those Christ-followers who stand in the grand tradition of the Reformation.

This tradition is concisely represented in the five *Solas* of the Reformation. *Sola* is Latin for only, or alone, and is used to distinguish the biblical doctrines of Scripture, Grace, Faith, Christ, and Glory to God from the beliefs, definitions, and components added to them by the Medieval church. Simply put, the Solas scrape away the human compromises which the church had attached to these essential doctrines in order to present biblical truth as it was meant to be understood. We remember the Reformation Season, not as a memorial to Martin Luther or any other man, but as a celebration of God's grace in bringing the glorious light of the Gospel back to the church. For this reason, a new latin motto was born during the Reformation era: Post Tenebras Lux — *After Darkness Light*.



Sola Scriptura | Scripture Alone

When Martin Luther took holy orders and became an Augustinian friar, he joined a church that was consumed with scholastic philosophy and the historical pronouncements of the church rather than Scripture. In fact, these “traditions” had become so pronounced among the leadership that they were given a higher place than the inspired Word of God.

How had this happened? Over time, the Medieval church leadership came to believe that the church had actually decided which writings were Scripture and which weren't. This led to their belief that the decisions, creeds, and pronouncements of the church carried a higher authority than the Bible. In fact the Bible, found only in Latin, was hardly known among the priesthood and inaccessible to the people. Those who dared translate the Bible into the vernacular were charged with heresy and often executed.

As a friar, Martin Luther had access for a few hours a week to the only copy of the Bible in his monastery which was chained to a large wooden podium. But it was his consistent study of the Bible that opened his eyes to its beauty and especially its authority.

Later he would write, *“Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men’s books and human teachers.”*

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This understanding of the supremacy of the Bible's authority is what *Sola Scriptura* declares. But what do we mean when we say we hold to "*Scripture Alone*"?

First, it is helpful to state what *Sola Scriptura* does not mean. It does not mean that we reject all other knowledge or refuse to see the benefit of other writings. It does not mean that we reject the historic Creeds and Confessions that describe, define, and defend biblical truth.

Sola Scriptura simply means that, in comparison with all other sources of knowledge and authority, *only God's Word has the right to bind our consciences making it the highest and final authority in the life of the Christ-follower.* Everything else must be held up to the light of Scripture and pushed through the grid of Scripture, and where it is not in alignment, it must be rejected.

Why is this our belief? There are three reasons we hold to *Sola Scriptura*:

1. The Bible Is Authentic

To say the Bible is *authentic* is to affirm that it is the very Word of God. Paul confirmed this in 2 Timothy 3:16,17:

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

When Paul says Scripture is *breathed out by God* he is not suggesting God has lungs and pushes air over his vocal cords to make audible words. He is saying that in the same way you and I produce our own words, so also God has personally produced the very words of the Bible. That is, the words of the Bible and the whole of the Bible find as their creative source the very breath of God.

But how did the "breathed-out" words of God get written down by men without error? The Apostle Peter gives us the answer in 2 Peter 1:20,21:

... ²⁰knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

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The words produced by God the Father were written down by the human authors under the superintendency of God the Spirit so that, using their own vocabulary and style, each one's writings were a "one for one" with what God the Father had breathed out.

And if we took the time to research the history of the Bible, we would find that God the Spirit has also carried the text along so that today our Bibles are an accurate re-creation of the original biblical writings.

2. The Bible Is Authoritative

You might ask, *why go to all the trouble to prove the authenticity of the Bible as the very words of God?*

The answer is simple. The Bible, being God's very words, claims God's authority over every area of our lives, even as it declares God's gracious sovereignty and pervasive providence as the supreme authority over all creation.

This is the foundation for *Sola Scriptura*. The Reformation reclaimed God's authority as supreme and final over all things, especially the church. This essential understanding of Scripture led Luther to be courageous, even when refusing to recant could have meant death. When commanded to disavow what he had preached and written, he boldly declared:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures and by clear reason (for I do not trust in the pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

3. The Bible Is Sufficient

A final element in *Sola Scriptura* is the belief in the *sufficiency of Scripture*. Again, it is necessary first to describe what this belief is not.

To say we hold to the *sufficiency of Scripture* is not to say that we don't need or use other sources of truth. We do! We understand the benefit of what godly

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men and women have learned and written and preached under the tutelage of God the Spirit. We rightly recognize the value of other intellectual disciplines as well as other forms of authority. We recognize civil authority, governmental authority, labor laws, and other rules that allow for civil society.

But when we say the Bible is *sufficient*, we mean that Scripture as we now have it is the final expression of God's authority in this age, and we do not need further direct revelation from God. We do not need, nor do we attempt to create, more biblical material, more direct revelation from God simply because what we have in the 66 books is sufficient.

The Westminster Confession of Faith sums up the *sufficiency of Scripture* well:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

Lastly, to subscribe to *Sola Scriptura* also means a resolute commitment to honor, study, and obey the Bible. We must strive to know how the Bible works, what each book describes and how each adds to the overall wonderful story of God and his relationship with his creation, especially humanity which is formed as his image bearers, his representatives on his earth. This will mean reading the Bible intentionally, studying it individually and in community with the church, and then living it out consistently before a watching world. While *Sola Scriptura* is a doctrinal position, it is of no use if we do not make it the basis for how we think, speak, and act as Christ-followers and a church. May the Lord of the Scriptures find us faithful to him and useful for him.

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Prayer

Gracious God and Father, I am so very thankful for your Word. To think that you condescended to reveal yourself, your love, your grace, your power, and your truth to us in a way that we could understand moves me to great joy, but also humbles me before you. Forgive me, Lord, for too often underestimating the great benefit a daily time in the Word can be to me, and through me to those whose lives border mine. Forgive me for making more of the news than the Good News of the gospel. And forgive me for failing to allow the Word to “dwell richly” in me so that my daily life can be increasingly a testimony to your love, your truth, and your saving grace in my life. Help me Father, through the Spirit you have made to dwell in me, to drink deeply and be satisfied in my soul with the pure milk of the Word so that by it, I may grow and mature in respect to the salvation you have granted me. Father, thank you for your Word and its power in my life as I live in step with the Spirit, through Jesus Christ my Savior, Amen.



Sola Gratia | Grace Alone

In the late 15th and early 16th centuries the nature of God's salvation extended to mankind in Jesus Christ had been sorely corrupted by the Medieval church's additions of human merit into the equation. Salvation was more a function of human obedience than divine grace. While God's grace was acknowledged to start the process, a believer's ongoing standing in the family of God was dependent upon his or her obedience.

Medieval theologians taught the doctrine of prevenient grace which they defined as the grace of God that initiates the saving process that is then sustained through human merit. This view, with its roots in the 15th century, is still prevalent in Arminian theology.

When Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and many other men started actually studying the biblical truths of God's saving activity in Christ, they realized that the doctrine of grace needed to be re-discovered, taught, and upheld.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians contains the crux text on the grace of God in salvation. In Ephesians 2:1–10, we read:

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

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⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

From this and other biblical texts, the Reformers recovered the doctrine of God's sovereign grace which *alone* is both the source and the sustaining power of new life in Christ. It is best said this way:

*We are saved from the wrath of God,
by the grace of God,
for the glory of God!*

The truth about *grace* is found in the very meaning of the term. The Greek word *charis* that is translated “grace” literally refers to a gift, something that is given only on the basis of the will of the giver. God's saving grace is always given, but never deserved. It is never merited, can't be bought, and it is impossible to multiply or sustain it through human effort. This is why the Reformers insisted that it is *Sola Gratia* (*Grace Alone*) that is both the source, the initiating element, and the sustaining power of God's redemptive activity in the life of the Christ-follower.

Ephesians 2:1,4, and 5 give the basic reason why salvation must be by *grace alone*:

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved ...

Paul is adamant that everyone descended from Adam (see Romans 5:19) comes into this world alive physically but “dead” spiritually. We all were “*dead in the trespasses and sins.*” Only God is able to bring the dead back to life and sustain

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that new life which led Paul to say, “*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved ...*”

The reality of being dead in our sins meant that only God has the power to “re-create” spiritual life, and Paul insists it was “*by grace*” that we are saved. And what kind of grace? Not a grace that depends on our meritorious contribution to be effective. Not a grace that is incomplete apart from our good works. And certainly not a grace that, while divine and partakes of the divine attributes of power, perfection, and eternity, is insufficient to the job of bringing about redemption, salvation, and inclusion in God’s forever family.

This is the essence of the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Gratia*. We are saved by grace alone, and we will walk by grace alone, and we will understand and glorify our God by his eternal, redeeming, sanctifying, and sustaining grace alone.

²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

— *Romans 5:2*

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Almighty God, you are the Creator and Sustainer of all things, even as you uphold all things by the word of your power. But Father, at this moment it is not your power that amazes me and fills my heart with joy. No, as marvelous as your power is, it is your grace — your unmerited gracious and benevolent attitude toward me — that overwhelms me! O Father, I know my heart, that I am too often selfish, and too often arrogant, and too often unloving. And then I remember your eternal generosity to me, your love for me, your patience with me, and I remember that all of your blessings to me flow from your grace! And even more, I know that your gracious disposition toward me is undeserved, and is not motivated by anything in me! Father, forgive me for too often thinking that my obedience to you makes me more deserving of your blessing. Help me to reflect on your amazing grace so that my obedience becomes the result of my love for you and my desire to be useful to you! Thank you Lord for your grace, for your mercy, and for your love! May I grow in my ability to reflect your love in my love for others. Help me to love as I have been loved and so witness to my world that I belong to you, through Jesus Christ in whose Name I approach you in prayer, Amen.



Sola Fide | Faith Alone

The confusion over the nature of saving grace in the Medieval church was connected to an even greater confusion over the means by which that grace was apprehended by the sinner. Once again, it was the light of Scripture that lit the path of truth for Martin Luther and the other Reformers.

In his work as a University professor, Martin Luther had occasion to work through Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Later, as he was studying Psalms, he came to discover the essence that justification before God was only to be found *Sola Fide*, that is through *faith alone* apart from any human work or merit or worth. In his *Preface* to the *Latin Writings*, he explained:

Meanwhile in that same year, 1519, I had begun interpreting the Psalms once again. I felt confident that I was now more experienced, since I had dealt in university courses with St. Paul's Letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the Letter to the Hebrews. I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: "The justice of God is revealed in it." I hated that word, "justice of God," which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust.

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“But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn’t be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, “Isn’t it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?” This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: “The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: ‘The just person lives by faith.’” I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: “The just person lives by faith.” All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. I exalted this sweetest word of mine, “the justice of God,” with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise.”

Contrary to the teachings of the Medieval church which insisted that human merit — good works — were necessary to earn and sustain a just standing before God, Luther proclaimed that *salvation was by grace alone through faith alone!*

The doctrine of Justification teaches that all are dead in sin and headed for the righteous wrath of God but can all be “justified”, that is, accepted as righteous before God only through faith alone. The power of God unto salvation is apprehended, not by human worth or merit, but only through faith alone.

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It is necessary, however, to keep in mind that the saving power of God is found in his grace, while faith is the means by which this redeeming, saving, justifying, and preserving power of God's grace becomes real in the believing sinner. When the Scripture declares that "*the just shall live by faith*" or when we say we are *justified by faith* we must remember that it is not our faith that justifies. Rather, it is God who justifies by his grace all those to whom that grace is mediated through faith.

An illustration may help us here. Imagine a lake where a young man is swimming. Suddenly, he is flailing around in the water only minutes from drowning. A man who is walking by sees him and expertly throws out a lasso that encircles the young man enabling the man to pull him safely to shore. A reporter from the local paper is on the scene and his story appears in the next day's edition under the headline "Rope Saves Drowning Man."

Of course, this would be absurd. The rope didn't save the young man. It was the power of the man on shore, mediated through the rope, that drew the drowning man safely to the shore.

So also, it is God who saves by his grace, and his saving activity becomes our salvation through faith, and that faith is complete with no human worth or merit being added to it. This is *Sola Fide (Faith Alone)*.

A last but essential part of understanding *Sola Fide (Faith Alone)* is the recognition that this faith — unlike the rope in the above illustration — is not something we as sinners conjure up. Since we are *dead in trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1) we are separated from God and both unable and unwilling to come to God for rescue. Paul goes so far as to declare that the spiritual eyes of the unbelieving are blind, rendering them unable to recognize their own sin and the beauty of God the Father's offer of redemption in God the Son. We see this in 2 Corinthians 4:3,4:

³*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.*

⁴*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

In light of this blinded condition, we may ask, "*How then can a sinner express faith and so apprehend the saving grace of God?*" The answer is found once again in Paul's writings to the Ephesian church:

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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.

— *Ephesians 2:8,9*

Paul is clear. Both the power of salvation — God’s gracious saving activity — and the means whereby that power becomes active in the sinner, are both *of God*. In fact, they are his gifts.

Now, it would be redundant for Paul to call the grace of salvation a *gift* of God since the essence of *grace* is that it is a gift! This shows us that Paul’s primary emphasis here is that the faith that engages and appropriates God’s saving grace is also *God’s gift*!

Think of it this way. As sinners we were blind to the truth of God and his righteous wrath, as well as to our own sin and guilt before him. But at some point, God the Spirit rode into our lives on the gospel. There he opened our spiritual eyes first to our sinfulness bringing repentance and then to the beauty of Christ’s offer of rescue and redemption, thus initiating faith to believe the gospel and call upon the name of the Lord. And, as Paul writes, “*All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved* (Romans 10:13).”

For every Christ-follower, it must continue to amaze us and fill our hearts with gratitude to realize the mercy of God in granting us faith. That is the wonder of understanding the Reformation dogma of *Sola Fide* (*Faith Alone*)!

One last word is necessary before bringing this section on *Sola Fide* to a close. Our commitment to *faith alone* must never be reconfigured to allow for the absence of good works. Paul implores Timothy, and through him us as well, to be *ready for every good work* in 2 Timothy 2:20,21:

²⁰ *Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.*

²¹ *Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

Martin Luther is reported to have said this about the connection of saving faith and good works:

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“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”

His meaning is clear. While justification is by grace alone through faith alone and not in any way attributed to our human activity or merit, it is also true that all those God justifies he also sanctifies. That is, those in whom God the Spirit indwells will progress in likeness to Christ.

A baby that is healthy and alive will grow and mature. Likewise, a person possessing real spiritual life will grow and mature in good works.

The reformational doctrine of *Sola Fide (Faith Alone)* speaks to the truth that the saving grace of God becomes active in the life of a sinner only through faith and never as a result of works.

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

— Romans 4:2

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

— Romans 5:1

Prayer

Gracious Lord and Heavenly Father, I am overcome with the knowledge that the very faith through which your saving grace flows to me is itself a gift from you in the first place! O Lord, that is so humbling, and I so want to live in the wonder of your great love for me. Thank you for drawing me to Jesus. Thank you for sending your Spirit into my life, for opening my eyes to my sin and brokenness, and then to the beauty of your saving grace granted to me in the Lord Jesus Christ. Like that disciple, I cry out to you, “Lord I believe! Please help my unbelief!” Strengthen my resolve to grow in faith, to live out my faith, and to rest in your grace when my faith begins to fail. I am your child, and I want to be faithful to you for you have proven to be always faithful to me, through Jesus Christ I pray, Amen.



Solus Christus | Christ Alone

Of the five Reformation *Solas*, it is Christ Alone (*Solus Christus*) that stands as the great centerpiece holding the others in unity. All of Scripture points to Christ, and it was the truth about his unique person and sufficient accomplishments that occupied the very core of the Reformers' disagreements with the Medieval church of their day.

During the Medieval period, and especially during the 15th and 16th centuries, the power of the church grew exponentially. In many cities and regions, the church was more powerful than the local governments and in many areas the church was the government.

The power of the church was enlarged through the rules and regulations that, in the absence of biblical instruction, became the cultural standards and expectations that governed daily life. In this way, the church became the focus rather than Christ.

To be faithful to God was to obey the church. To be blessed by God was to attend to the seven sacraments of the church, which in Roman Catholic theology were the "spigots" from which the grace of God flowed from priest to congregant. Apart from the sacraments, the grace of God was not received. In this way, the church came to have the power of life and death. Life was hard, superstition was rife, and the only answer was to trust in the church and its regulations. As well, those who went against the church risked excommunication and even death.

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Overwhelmingly, the people had begun to trust in the church, believe in the church, obey the church, and come to rest their eternal destinies in following the dictates of the church.

Against the backdrop of this perversion of true dedication and love for Christ, the Reformers aimed their reforming principles at the place the church played in life. They understood the biblical truth that it was Christ, not the church, that saved souls. They recognized that the church had replaced Christ himself as the object of faith. And once again, the Reformation slogan came to epitomize the Reformers' beliefs and teaching:

“The church reformed and always reforming according to Scripture.”

In their attempts to bring the church back to the centrality of Christ, they declared that grace and faith were always connected to the Lord Jesus himself. Simply put, with *Sola Scriptura* as their authority, they declared that sinners were saved by *grace alone* (*Sola Gratia*) *through faith alone* (*Sola Fide*) *in Christ alone* (*Solus Christus*).

As mentioned above, it is important to understand that it is not our *faith* that saves us. It is always the *object of that faith* that saves. It was never the case that faith in human merit, or faith in the church, or faith in anything else was capable of apprehending the saving grace of God!

Once again, Paul the Apostle is our guide here. As he writes in Philippians 3:2–6, Paul had every reason to place his faith in his own religious activity and merit. He had every right to trust the religious system in which he was raised and by which he gained great stature and notoriety as an adult:

²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

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Yet when Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, and the Spirit of God drove home the truth of the gospel of Jesus, this Pharisee's eyes were opened to the truth that it was Jesus — Christ alone — that saves, as he describes in Philippians 3:7–9:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith ...

Notice how Paul came to recognize the primacy of Jesus Christ:

- But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
- I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus
- in order that I may gain Christ
- that which comes through faith in Christ

Later, the writer of Hebrews would sum up the primacy of Christ as the object of our faith and the Savior of our souls this way in Hebrews 12:1–3:

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

The author of Hebrews is adamant: “Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith...”

In their study of Scripture, the Reformers realized that the church had come to overshadow its Lord Jesus Christ. No longer was the church “under the Lordship of Christ.” No longer did the church see its life as flowing from the “Head” of the church (Colossians 1:18). Rather, the church had been corrupted through the

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combination of its ignorance of Scripture and its desire for power and wealth. Against this cultural backdrop, the Reformers proclaimed the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all Creation, the Head of the church, and the only Savior and Redeemer of souls.

Salvation is by *grace alone* (Sola Gratia), *through faith alone* (Sola Fide) *because of Christ alone* (Solus Christus).

And why is that? The interaction between Paul and the Philippian jailer gives the best answer. After the earthquake had opened all the cell doors in the Philippian prison holding Paul and Silas, the jailer thought he would be held responsible for the escape of all the prisoners. But Paul saw the whole episode as an evangelistic opportunity, as described in Acts 16:28–34:

28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” 29 And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

So why is saving faith to be focused on Jesus Christ alone? Because the saving grace of God is ours through faith in Christ only because Christ alone has done what it took for God to be just in justifying sinners.

Our problem was two-fold: As sinners we had a bad record of crimes against the court of Heaven. We were guilty and justly deserving of eternal punishment under the righteous wrath of Almighty God. But we also had bad hearts! Even if our actions could be forgiven, our nature was still corrupt, our hearts depraved, and our minds debased. The just God could never allow our corruption to dwell eternally in his presence.

So God did what only God could do. God the Son willingly became a substitute for us by taking our sin upon himself and enduring the unobstructed wrath of

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God the Father on the cross. In doing so, Jesus Christ effectively and eternally payed the debt we owed to the court of heaven. We could never have paid it ourselves and neither could we have escaped it. The justice of God the Father demanded payment in full, and Jesus Christ did that. He died in our place and for our benefit and did so as our substitute. This means that God the Father accepted the death of Christ *as though it were ours* and on that basis declares that we are righteous before him.

And what about our bad hearts? As we saw above in Philippians 3, Paul came to understand that the only righteousness God the Father will accept is perfect righteousness, which only exists in God himself:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith ...

The miracle of redemption in Christ is that, not only does God the Father accept Jesus' death as though it were ours thus wiping away our debt to the court of heaven, he also accepts the righteousness of Christ as though it were ours thus declaring us righteous, justified before him. Paul sums it up beautifully in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Solus Christus (Christ alone) means that our faith can only be in Christ. We can trust the promises God the Father has made to us *because* the death and righteousness of God the Son have been attributed to us.

Here in lies the comfort of *Solus Christus*. God the Son took our sin upon himself and, in turn, granted his perfect righteousness to our account leaving no obstacle in the way of God the Father declaring us accepted eternally.

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and

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invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

— Colossians 1:15–20

Prayer

Father, Almighty God, you are the Guardian and Shepherd of my soul, and I am amazed that, because of Jesus Christ, your love and mercy surround me, filling my life now and securing my future eternally. Lord, forgive me for those times when I forget the greatness of Jesus, when I fail to make much of him in my life, my speech, my friendships, and my spiritual commitments. Forgive me Lord, for thinking too shallowly of my Savior, for treating him as my life-coach rather than the risen King, the Lord of all Creation, and the Savior of my soul. Use whatever means are necessary Father to heighten my knowledge of Christ, my love for my Savior, and my dependence on Jesus my Lord and Master. Teach me to rest in his love and grace so that I may be both winsome and bold in reflecting his truth, his character, and his gospel in the world around me, through the power of the Spirit who dwells in me, Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria | Glory to God Alone

This last *Sola* brings all the other *Solas* together and shows how they form an unbreakable chain of doctrinal precision.

When we commit ourselves to *Sola Scriptura* (*Scripture Alone*) as our only infallible source of truth, and come to understand our salvation is by *Sola Gratia* (*Grace Alone*), through *Sola Fide* (*Faith Alone*), in the person and work of *Solus Christus* (*Christ Alone*), it only makes sense to realize the truth of *Soli Deo Gloria* (*Glory to God Alone*)! He alone is worthy of our life-long commitment, our worthy worship, and our joyful obedience.

As stated in the previous section (*Solus Christus*), the Medieval church had become its own kingdom. The light of the gospel had been almost entirely extinguished through the corrupt additions and subtractions of human lust, greed, and power. There was a true and deep famine of biblical truth and the ethics of the church had, as a result, become indisputably corrupt.

Long before Luther, others had tried to “reform” the church. For example in the late 15th century, a reform movement attempted to outlaw the appointment of a priest’s sons to their own parish given that priests were to be celibate. This was just one of many flagrant repudiations of biblical morality.

As Luther and the others began to see the deficiencies in the church, its leadership, and its teaching, they realized that beneath them all was a desire

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to receive the glory and personal prominence that belonged to Almighty God alone. The Medieval church was reminiscent of ancient Israel whom David describes this way in Psalm 36:1:

*¹Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God before his eyes.*

The solemn truth was that the Medieval church had lost its fear of God. They no longer looked up in humility and submission but rather looked around with personal ambition and a desire for power, wealth, and fame.

Against this flood of man-centered church life, the Reformers determined to bring the church back under the majesty of God. One of the most important contributions to the return of God-centered worship was Luther's determination to return the singing of God's praises to times of corporate worship. His anthems pointed the hearts of worshippers back to the glory of God, the generosity and grace of God, and the obedience that was the privilege of the people of God.

As well, the Reformers returned the preaching of the Bible to the center of the corporate gathering. The pulpit was moved back to the front of the auditorium and was most often high and lifted up to allow for biblical exposition to be prominent in the life of the church.

The Reformation also saw the return of theological education to the church. Calvin, for example, had two academies in Zurich, one for children of all ages and another dedicated to the training of ministers.

More could be said about the ways the Reformers attempted to turn the church's attention away from self and to God, but the guiding principle in all these efforts was a passion to recover *Soli Deo Gloria* (*Glory to God alone*)!

And what did they mean by *Soli Deo Gloria*? Simply this. Nothing in all the world, in all of life, was to be given the prominence, the dedication, the focus, the glory that belonged to Almighty God alone. He alone dwells in unapproachable light, and he alone is worthy of all honor, and power, and glory. To this the Reformers were dedicated, and it was this dedication that drove all their efforts to reform the church according to Scripture.

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As we have seen, the five *Solas* are a unit rather than a collection of separate truths. They are co-dependent and must be understood as integral pieces of an indivisible whole.

Where *Sola Scriptura* is eroded, human ideology will seep in and God's truth will be discarded.

Where *Sola Gratia* is forgotten, human merit will rise to the top.

Where *Sola Fide* is compromised, good works will become the standard means of being and remaining justified before God.

Where *Solus Christus* is replaced with the worship of church leaders, the stability, morality, and witness of the church will be more easily disregarded.

And when *Soli Deo Gloria* is no longer the daily preoccupation of the church, its plans and resources will be directed at the kingdom of men rather than the mission and kingdom of God.

But this will not be the case as long as the Spirit of God is using the Word of God to do the work of God in the lives of the people of God. It is to the truth of Scripture that the Reformers turned in the midst of their cultural darkness. Let this be our resolve, to be people of the Book who love the truth and live out the truth in love.

The Church reformed, and always reforming, according to Scripture!

Sola Scriptura • Sola Gratia • Sola Fide • Solus Christus • Soli Deo Gloria

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

— Jude 24

Prayer

Gracious God, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I come to you with a heart full of wonder and praise for all you have revealed of yourself and your redemptive plan to me in your Word. Many times, when I look at my life, I am ashamed at the

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shallowness of my contemplation of your sovereignty, your truth, your mercy, your grace, and most of all your love for me! O Lord, rekindle in me a passion for your glory! Strengthen my resolve to be faithful to you in all my commitments! Shave the edges off my pride, and pop the bubble of my arrogance that I might be still more useful to you! For you are my God, and my life belongs to you. You are my hiding place, and you are my only hope in this life and the next. I love you Father and once again offer you my life as your Son has given his for me. Here I am, use me for your glory, through the power of Jesus Christ and the Spirit who dwells in me, Amen.



Reformation Sunday

Today we remember a crucial time in the history of the church when a group of ordinary men and women called the Church back to the truth of Scripture. The time was the early 1500's. The Church had fallen into great immorality and serious doctrinal error. As Spain's Queen Isabella said, "*the dissolution is such that the souls entrusted to the clergy receive great damage.*" Most of the problems stemmed from an almost total disregard for Scripture. The Church had long held that only trained clergy could possess copies of the Bible, lest the sacred Word fall into the hands of those "unskilled in its interpretation." Thus, even those few among the people who could read had no opportunity to read the Bible. As the opinions and desires of men became the driving dogmas of the day, gross error arose within the church.

Perhaps the greatest example of error was that of indulgences. By order of Pope Leo X, special messengers of the Church were authorized to sell certificates good for the remission of sins. This fundraising effort was needed to build the great St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In exchange for a generous contribution, the church promised that an extra measure of forgiving grace would be granted to a dead loved one now languishing in purgatory, awaiting eternal rest. In Germany, the task of raising money through the sale of indulgences was entrusted to Johann Tetzel. Being quite creative, Tetzel even used a jingle to advertise the sale of indulgences. He was famous for proclaiming "*as soon as your coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs!*" It was this widespread practice of offering the grace and forgiveness of God at a price that proved too much for those pious souls trying desperately to bring the Church back to the ways of Scripture and

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the Lord. Chief among them was a young German monk living in Wittenberg named Martin Luther.

So overcome with anger at the sale of indulgences was Luther that he wrote 95 statements giving his views. His only intention was to open a debate with the scholars of the church regarding the true nature of repentance and forgiveness of sins. As was the custom in those days, public notices and announcements were nailed to the large wooden door of the Wittenberg church. It was to this door that Luther walked on October 31, 1517. With hammer and nails, he tacked his *95 Theses* to the rough wood. This seemingly simple act of academic inquiry was to have far reaching results. From that tiny spark, a fire of reformation grew that forever changed the face of biblical religion around the world.

From its beginning in Wittenberg, the Reformation was grounded in Luther's return to Scripture as the final rule for faith. As a monk he had grown increasingly aware of his own sin. He came increasingly to see that, as a sinner, all of his works, even those that were righteous, were tainted by the sinful heart and mind that conceived of them. As he read the law of God, he was angry with God and said *"As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!"*

After months of grueling study and searching, Luther despaired of ever finding an answer to the sickness of his soul. Then, in the providence of God, he began to meditate upon Romans 1:16–17. It was here that the simple message burned brightly: *the just shall live by faith*. Luther realized that contrary to all that he had believed, the sinner was accepted before God only on the basis of Christ's righteousness, which was granted to the sinner through faith alone. He wrote, *"Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."*

From that moment, Luther became an advocate for the Gospel. His argument against the selling of indulgences was only a beginning. Realizing that the Bible opened up the truth of God, he began to translate it into German and make it available to the public. He wrote numerous books and pamphlets describing the abuses of the church and the truth of Scripture. In his writing and speaking, Luther brought a single unified message: *to truly be the church, the church must*

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reform itself according to the teachings of God's Word. As reformational teaching spread, surrounding countries came under the anointed preaching of men who, like Luther, opened up the truth of Scripture and exposed the error of the day. Whole cities were converted, countries changed, and the course of human history forever altered.

Soon Martin Luther, a devoted son of the church, was branded an enemy, and summoned to appear before the king's council to answer to the charge of heresy. There in the city of Worms, in 1521, Luther faced his accusers. In a large room were assembled the emperor, the pope's representatives, archbishops, bishops, dukes, princes, counts, and a numerous array of dignitaries of every rank representing the highest powers of both church and state. In the middle of the room was a table piled high with copies of Luther's books and papers.

Johann Von Eck, acting on behalf of the council put two simple questions to the young reformer, *"Do you acknowledge that these are your books, the product of your mind and pen? And will you now, before assembled council, recant or retract them?"*

So overcome was Luther with the seriousness of the questions, and knowing that failure to satisfy the council could result in a death sentence, he humbly asked for a respite of one day to consider his answer. This the council granted, and Luther was led away to a room where he prayed and meditated all through the night.

In a letter to a friend written in the early morning hours, he gave a preview of the day's events: *"I shall not retract one iota, so Christ help me!"*

That day, Thursday, April 18, Luther appeared a second time before the council for what would forever be considered his finest hour. As he entered the hall, an old soldier, Georg von Frundsberg spoke these words of encouragement: *"My poor monk, my poor monk, thou art going to make such a stand as neither I nor any of my companions in arms have ever done in our hottest battles. If thou art sure of the justice of thy cause, then forward in God's name, and be of good courage: God will not forsake thee."*

Now Luther was ready to answer the questions. To the first he gave a lengthy, modest, and firm answer stating that the books represented, not his thoughts,

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but the clear teaching of Scripture. To the second he gave the famous answer often repeated today:

“Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the pope nor the councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me and my conscience is bound in the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen.”

The emperor could stand to hear no more and fearing that the logic and courage of Luther would change the minds of some assembled, he abruptly ended the session amid great commotion. Luther retreated to his lodging and was heard there to exclaim: *“I am through, I am through! If I had a thousand heads, I would rather have them all cut off one by one than make one recantation.”*

The assembly eventually passed an edict naming Luther *“a devil in the dress of a monk, who gathered a mass of old and new heresies into one pool.”* Luther was officially outlawed by both the church and state, condemned by the pope, the emperor, the universities, cast out of human society, and left open to the sentence of death.

Yet, he had the providence of God on his side. The verdict of the assembly was not to be the verdict of history. Luther was granted protection by Frederick of Saxony and lived a full and rich life, studying, writing, and teaching a whole generation the glorious truths of Scripture. He wrote numerous books, tracts, and commentaries. He published a German translation of the Holy Bible, wrote several hymns and was known for discussions around the dinner table with his students. And while Martin Luther was a man beset by weaknesses and sins, his desire to proclaim the truth of Scripture at any cost has carved him a place in history that deserves commendable remembrance.

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday, not as a memorial to a man, but as a celebration of God’s grace in bringing the glorious light of the Gospel back to the church. And in celebrating the recovery of the Gospel, we also celebrate the work of the Gospel in our hearts, for we have come to understand that *“it is the*

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power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, But the righteous man shall live by faith.” Romans 1:16–17. Soli Deo Gloria: To God Alone be the Glory!

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly
beyond all that we ask or think,
according to the power that works within us,
to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

— Ephesians 3:20–21



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