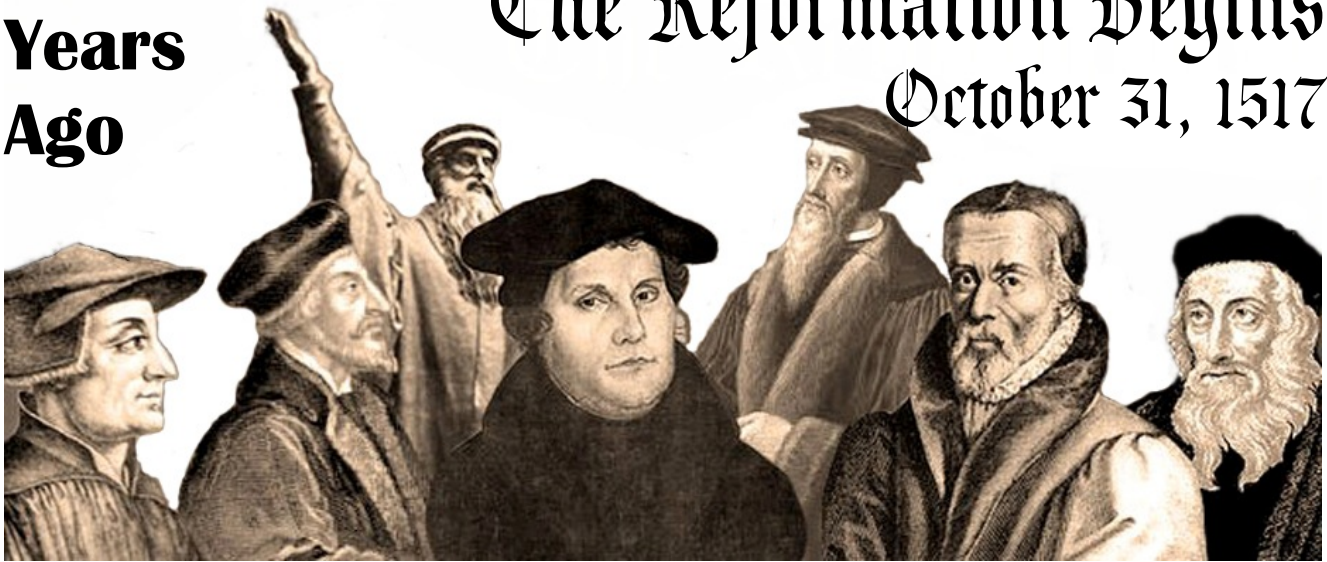


**500
Years
Ago**

The Reformation Begins

October 31, 1517



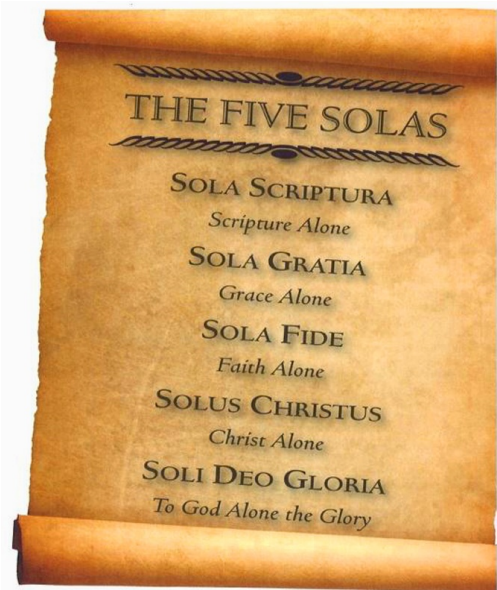
The five *solas* are five Latin phrases popularized during the Protestant Reformation that emphasized the distinctions between the early Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church.

#1- *Sola Scriptura* - Scripture Alone!

Romans 4:1-8

Five hundred years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany, marking the beginning of the Reformation. The Reformation was basically a back to the Bible movement as precious truths were uncovered. One problem today is that the aim of some is to go back to the Reformation, instead of back to the Scriptures. Thus the weakness of the Reformers in understanding the church, prophecy, dispensational truth, etc. is carried over to Reformed Theology today. It's always best to go to the pure spring of truth rather than to the polluted stream farther away from the source. We can, however, learn from the Reformers.

There are five great truths which came out of the Reformation, the first of which is **SOLA SCRIPTURA—Scripture Alone!** As Paul clearly taught, there is only one question that matters: “**What saith the Scripture?**” (Rom. 4:3). Man’s tradition must never usurp God’s absolute truth (John 17:17). Popes, priests and pastors are very fallible, but the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). Scientific theories change with the times, but the Word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8). Any light which came from the Reformation came from the beacon of Scripture. Apart from the Bible men’s minds are darkened (Eph. 4:18). Only in the Bible do we find our infallible rule of faith, our sure guide for what we must believe and how we should live. It is a lamp to our feet and its truth fully illuminates our path (Psalm 119:105). We must not follow our thoughts, our opinions, our ideas; nor should we trust the wisdom of the most brilliant men. One thing alone matters: “**What saith the Scripture?**”



“Feelings come and feelings go and feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the Word of God, naught else is worth believing!” (Luther)

#2- *Sola Gratia* - Grace Alone!

Titus 3:4-8

One of the great truths which was uncovered at the time of the Reformation was the fact that men are saved **by grace alone**. Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9)—all of God and none of man. Because God’s perfect justice was satisfied due to the finished work of Christ on the cross, God is now free to be gracious to hell-deserving sinners. Grace is God’s favor and kindness freely bestowed on those who are totally undeserving of God’s merciful benefits. God’s grace is defined in Titus 3:4 as “the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward **man**,” even the man who is described in verse 3 as “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” It is also defined in Ephesians 2:7 as “His kindness toward **us** through Christ Jesus;” with the “us” being in context those who were dead in trespasses and sins (verses 1 and 5). We are not worthy of the least of His favors, but God was willing to die for the ungodly (Rom. 5:8).

While all religions are based on man achieving salvation by his own works, grace excludes any kind of human works or meritorious efforts: “If by grace, then is it no more of works...if it be of works, then it is no more grace” (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9). Religion is man seeking to bring Himself to God, which is an impossibility. Salvation is God sending His Son to the cross so that “**He** might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). Not only is our salvation totally dependent upon the grace of God, but so also is living the Christian life: “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Cor. 15:10; see 2 Cor. 9:8). We are debtors to God’s grace!

#3- *Sola Fide* - Faith Alone!

Romans 3:21-31

The watch-cry of the Reformation was “Justification by faith.” Luther and the Reformers agreed with Paul’s conclusion, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). How can salvation be both by **grace alone** and also by **faith alone**? Grace is God’s side; faith is man’s side. How does God save a wretched sinner? **Only by grace!** (Acts 15:11) What must man do? **Only believe** (Acts 16:31). While grace and works are two principles which are utterly opposed (Rom. 11:6), yet grace and faith are united in perfect harmony in God’s salvation plan (Eph. 2:8). Faith is not working, but it is resting on the perfect work of Another (Rom. 4:5). The Saviour cried, “It is finished!”; the man of faith responds, “It is enough!” Faith is the hand of the heart that reaches out and receives the free gift which God offers in His grace (John 1:12; Rom. 5:16-18; 6:23).

The believer does not boast in his faith, but He boasts in a great Saviour who is the object of his faith (1 Cor. 1:29-31). Faith is when a person rests all of his weight on the Person of God (**Who He is**), on the work of God (**what He has done**) and on the Word of God (**what He has said**). Justification is that work of God whereby the believing sinner is declared to be perfectly righteous in God’s righteous Son (2 Cor. 5:21). We could never achieve such a perfect righteousness, and we could never gain heaven without it. It is fully provided in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Justification by faith is so vitally important that God emphasizes it three times in just one verse (Gal. 2:16)!

How tragic that sin-blinded, self-righteous men are determined to present to God their own fig leaf coverings!

#4- *Solus Christus* - Christ Alone!

Colossians 1:12-22

In all things Christ is to have the preeminence (first place). When it comes to salvation, Christ is everything (Col. 1:18). His very name (“Jesus”) means Saviour (Matt. 1:21). Our full redemption is grounded in His marvelous Person, His finished cross-work, His glorious resurrection and His guaranteed promises. The Catholic religious system of the 16th century was man-centered and based on tradition, not truth. People were told that they could not understand the Bible on their own, but instead they needed the church and certain religious leaders to interpret it for them. They were told that they could not go to God directly, thus the need for human priests. Mary was given an exalted place in the church’s worship. Formalism and ritualism and dead orthodoxy characterized the church services. The church was corrupt and encouraged the sale of indulgences to fatten its coffers and to supposedly shorten the soul’s sojourn in purgatory. They were full of religion but they had little of Christ.

Luther’s religious mentors were blind to the soul-freeing doctrine of justification by faith through Christ alone. Their question was, “If you leave the Christian to live only by faith and if you sweep away all our good works, our adoration of relics, our singing of masses, our pilgrimages to Rome, our purchasing of pardon for sins, etc., then what will you put in their place?” Luther’s answer was simple, “Jesus Christ and Him alone! He is all we need!” How tragic that the established church had abandoned Jesus Christ!

The Reformation was a call to return to Christ and His Word. He is all and in all (Col. 3:11). “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). “Christ liveth in me” and we live by the faith of the One who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). Does Christ have first place in your heart?

#5- *Soli Deo Gloria* - To God Alone be the Glory!

Romans 11:33-36; Hebrews 13:20-21

It is very natural for us to be man-centered in our outlook. We see things from our human point of view, but we are missing the big picture. It’s not about us; it’s all about the Almighty, the most high God. Our thoughts and our outlook must be theocentric rather than anthropocentric, that is, God-centered, rather than man-centered. We must see things from God’s point of view.

A. W. Tozer, in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, wrote the following, “The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. This low view of God is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate. If we would bring back spiritual power to our lives, we must begin to think of God more nearly as He is. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. There is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.”

We are here for only one reason, to glorify our Creator. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Catechism). Whatever we do, including the most mundane activities, should all be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Only in Him do we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28). How often do Paul, Peter, John and Jude burst into doxology, “To Him be glory forever and ever!” (Rom. 11:36; 2 Pet. 3:18, Rev. 1:6; Jude 25, etc.).

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