

For the Glory of a God Alone  
Part IV of the Reformation "Solas"  
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Well, this is the final installment of our four-part series on the Protestant Reformation. Before we focus on our topic, "The glory of God alone," I want to make a few comments in response to questions some of you have asked me over the last couple of weeks:

The imputed righteousness of Jesus, His perfect score credited to each and every believer in Jesus, is an important truth often neglected in evangelical teaching. As we talk about what happens when we become a Christian, we usually focus on God forgiving our sins. I describe this as God erasing the failing score beside our name which each of us has because of our sin. Yet, this is only one half of the wonderful truth we call justification by grace, through faith in Jesus, alone. God does not merely give us a clean slate and another chance. He gives us a perfect score beside our name, which makes us right before God. This righteousness or score, can never be changed or taken away. It guarantees we will be welcomed into heaven as God's beloved son or daughter.

This righteousness is not because of anything *we do*, but because of what Jesus has done. He earned it through perfect obedience to God the Father, both as He lived life, and as He died on the cross. That what Jesus did would be counted as our own accomplishment is a gift of pure grace, experienced when we place our trust in Jesus Christ. It was what the Apostle Paul described in **Philippians 3:9** *So that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.* The imputed righteousness of Christ having Jesus' righteousness counted as our own, is something which should always fill our hearts with gratitude and our lips with praise. And it is something we should talk about, both with each other and folks around us who need to experience this great salvation only God can provide.

At the same time, as we delight in the truth of justification, we should not neglect the truth of sanctification. This is the process where the Holy Spirit enables us as Christians to become more like Jesus Christ in our character

and actions. It involves our actual score as we live each day, becoming closer and closer to the perfect score which is by our name. The Protestant Reformers disagreed with each other on this topic. I don't want to every simplify, but Luther basically said, "Don't worry about what the actual score is. Just focus on that perfect score beside your name." Oh, Luther thought Christians should strive to obey God. He knew that was what was pleasing to the Lord. Yet, he was convinced our sin nature is so pervasive, that raising this score is almost a futile effort.

John Calvin, the other great leader of the Reformation, disagreed with Luther. He agreed that our sin nature makes becoming more like Jesus, or raising that actual score, a challenge. However, he felt Luther underestimated the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer. By God's grace, as we trust in the Lord, the Holy Spirit enables us to slowly, but surely, make progress and become more like Christ. In fact, Calvin said if we are not becoming more like Christ, if our actual score is not going up, it is a flashing red light, warning us our faith in Jesus might not be genuine. Luther did not like to make that connection. On this one, I think Calvin was closer to what the Bible teaches. Okay...now, to today's topic.

Before Elvis, the Beatles, and Nobel Prize winner Bobby Zimmerman, also known as Bob Dylan, there was *Johann Sebastian Bach*, probably the greatest musical composer of all time. Bach, the grand master of classical baroque music was born in 1685, and was very much influenced by the Protestant Reformation. At the bottom of each of his compositions he would write his initials, and then the Latin words, "Soli Deo Gloria." "Only to God be the glory." Or, "To God alone be the glory." Folks, that phrase is our topic today. This month we have been doing a special sermon series to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. That very significant event of history "started" on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, posted his ninety-five thesis, or statement, on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany.

We have not focused on the personalities, but on the teaching of the Reformation, and have covered the key ideas of the Bible's authority alone, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Our final topic is "For the glory of God alone." This is an important part of understanding the salvation we experience when we trust Jesus Christ. Yet, as Johann S. Bach understood, God can be glorified not just in our salvation, but in all aspects of life. In fact, I believe this is a very significant contribution of the reformation, that ordinary aspects of life can be used to bring glory to God alone. Friends, let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear, understand, believe and obey His word as He speaks to us today.

In the 1500s it was common to think of "saints" as those Christians in heaven who had demonstrated extraordinary faith and devotion to God. Luther, however, noted that this is not how the Bible uses the term. The word is used sixty times in the New Testament. And almost always refers to ordinary Christians here on earth. For example, **Ephesians 1:1b**, the Apostle Paul addresses that letter, *To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus*. Luther noted that, yes, God intended there to be leaders in the church, pastors, teachers, et cetera, but that all believers in Jesus Christ are "saints" and have an opportunity to glorify God. He was especially struck by what Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 10:31** *So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*. Folks, eating and drinking is a very ordinary part of life. We each do this a number of times every day. Thus, you don't have to be a pastor, a missionary or Sunday school teacher to bring glory to God. Ordinary people can do ordinary things, in ordinary ways, for His glory.

Luther reportedly said, *"The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays – not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."* Ordinary people, a maid, a shoemaker, et cetera, doing ordinary things, sweeping floors and making shoes, doing it in an ordinary way, without singing hymns all the time. Incidentally, when I was growing up on the farm, I would sometimes sing hymns as I milked the cows. It increased

milk production...maybe. Anyway, singing hymns while doing chores is great, but that or putting some other religious frosting on your work, is not a requirement for doing your job for the glory of God.

So, what is required? Whether you are driving a truck at the mine, caring for a patient at the hospital, or serving a warrant as a police officer (we have a few of those here today) how can you do that for the glory of God? If you are playing basketball, or cheering at a hockey game, or making dinner for your family, or washing dishes after the meal, how can you do that for the glory of God?

Well, Luther said, to truly glorify God, in any activity **one must do it as a Christian**, as someone who is trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Now, when a surgeon who is an atheist or Muslim saves someone's life in the operating room, that act is likely pleasing to God. However, she cannot truly glorify God unless she is doing so as a Christian, as a representative of the Lord Jesus. Now, I want to make sure we are on the same page. The Bible is pretty clear that a Christian is not merely someone who believes in God, or goes to church, or who has been Baptized, or who is a nice person. A Christian is someone, who by God's grace, is trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. Or as I like to say, a Christian does not merely believe facts about Jesus, but believes in Jesus, trusting not in self or anyone or anything else, but in Jesus. That is to what the Apostle Paul was referring when he wrote...in those verses we read or recited earlier, **Ephesians 2:8, 9** *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*. A person can become a Christian only through trusting in Jesus. And only as a Christian can someone truly bring glory to God.

So, how then does a Christian, an ordinary Christian, eat, drink, work or play for the glory of God? Number one, we do it with gratitude. If we have received God's salvation, something we realize we in no way deserve, gratitude should become the underlying theme of our lives. After all, everything from eternal salvation to the air we breathe is a gift from God. This should cause gratitude to fill our souls. We can resonate with what Paul says in **Corinthians 4:7** *What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift?* Friend, a Christian can

glorify God when she drinks a glass of orange juice, delights in that tangy sweetness, and feels gratitude to God because she enjoys a diet which includes far more than bread and water. A Christian can glorify God as he drives to work in the morning, to a job which requires him to work hard, for minimal pay, alongside people he doesn't really enjoy, but feeling gratitude because it provides the money he needs to support his family. One can feel gratitude watching your favorite football team lose the NFC championship game, just because you enjoy football. Gratitude, recognizing everything good we have is a gift from the Lord, is a big part of glorifying God.

Number two, we glorify God as we eat, drink, work, play or whatever we do, by showing grace to others as we do it. Those of us who are believers in Jesus, have experienced amazing grace as we received a salvation we in no way deserve. Because we have been given grace, we ought to show grace to others. When we do that, when we are kind, considerate and forgiving to the waiter who goofs up our order, when we volunteer to work on a project with the new student at school no one else talks to, we bring glory to God. When those who have received the grace of God through Jesus Christ, reflect that grace to other people, even if they don't deserve it, this brings glory to God.

Number three, we glorify God when as we eat, drink, work, play or whatever we do, we seek to please Him. That is the number one question: Is what I am doing pleasing to the Lord? That is more important than what a boss or supervisor thinks, more important than what friends and family members think, even more important than your own evaluation of yourself. It is not that we don't care about what others think, or about our own thoughts, but ultimately it is God whom we desire to please. Because, if God is happy with what we are doing, what anyone else thinks doesn't really matter, and if God is not happy with what we are doing, what anyone else thinks doesn't really matter. The best way to glorify God as we live our seemingly ordinary lives, is to seek to play for an audience of one, to focus on what will honor Him. This is reflected in Paul's instructions in ***Ephesians 6:7*** *Do you work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.*

So, we glorify God, when as believers in Jesus Christ when:

1. We feel gratitude
2. We show grace
3. We focus on pleasing the Lord, as we live our lives.

When we do that, we are fulfilling our responsibility given in ***1 Corinthians 10:31*** *So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Soli deo Gloria*—to God alone be the glory.

So, what does this look like in real life? Well, let me tell you about my friend, Joe. You have not met him, but you know people like him. Joe works as a cop, has been in law enforcement for over twenty years. Joe has always believed God existed, but that belief has never been a big part of his life. He used to attend church occasionally with his parents when he was growing up, but it had pretty much been just weddings and funerals since junior high...that is, until five years ago. That is when a big change occurred in Joe's life. For about three years before that, Joe had become a pretty unhappy camper. His dad was killed in a car accident, things with his wife, Mary, kept getting more and more tense, and three kids who were starting to enter their teen years made things at home pretty chaotic. Between that, and the daily pressures of being a cop, Joe was getting pretty stressed out. Trying to relieve that stress he started drinking more, a lot more, which made things between him and Mary worse, which meant Joe drank even more.

One day, when he was feeling really lousy Joe decided to call his old high school buddy, Jim, who was now a lawyer in Omaha, Nebraska. As they talked, Jim told Joe how his life had been transformed a few years earlier when he had become a Christian. Joe said, "I thought you were always a Christian."

Jim replied, "No, but now I am a real Christian. I am trusting in Jesus Christ as my savior, and each day my goal is to follow and please Him."

Joe said, "Jim, I just don't think that is me. I am just not a religious type of guy."

"Neither am I," Jim said. "But look at it this way: Do you believe in God?"

"Sure," Joe replied.

"Well," Jim said, "*If God really exists, what could be more important than Him?*" When Joe heard those words, something inside him clicked.

Well, to make a long story short, after a few more conversation with Jim, Joe became a real Christian, trusting in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. He started reading the Bible and going to a good church where they taught what the Bible said and meant. He stopped abusing alcohol, and after a year of attending church by himself almost every Sunday he was not working, Mary started going with him. Six months later, she became a real Christian too. A lot of things have changed in Joe's home. Oh, things are not perfect, but he and Mary get along better than almost any time in their marriage. And Joe is a lot more patient with his kids...though as teenagers, they still almost drive him crazy sometimes. A big reason why things are better at home, is because of the new attitude Joe has toward his job, and the fact that even though being a cop still has a lot of daily pressures, he doesn't get nearly as stressed out as he used to. Joe, now seeks to do his job "as though he was working for the Lord," and whether he is eating, drinking, or driving his squad car around, he tries to remember to do it for the glory of God.

Joe is a man full of gratitude. He knows his life was heading for a big crash before the Lord saved him. Knowing the Lord has forgiven his sins, made him righteous through Jesus, filled him with the Holy Spirit and promised him eternal life—even though he deserved none of those things, makes Joe grateful. And he has learned to be grateful for his job. Yes, he is grateful for the money he earns, but he has learned to appreciate the opportunities he has to protect and serve other people. Oh, Joe still likes his days off, but he is finding a lot more satisfaction in his work. Part of the reason for that is because he enjoys working with people more than ever before. He realizes that because he has been shown amazing grace as God saved him through Jesus, he should show grace to others. So, he strives to do that. He tries to treat his fellow officers, the people in the community, even the bad guys, with respect. He gives individuals the benefit of a doubt whenever he can. Oh, people still do things that really irritate him sometimes, but he is learning to not let that upset him too much, because he is now confident that no matter what happens, the Lord has his back.

And maybe, most important of all, Joe now realizes that if God is pleased with how he is doing his job, that is all that matters. As Joe was growing up, he always felt his dad was disappointed with him. Joe never excelled in either academics or athletics, two things which seemed important to his dad. When he became a police officer, however, Joe knew, for the first time in his life, that his dad was really proud of him. When his dad was killed in that car accident, the one person whose approval meant so much to Joe, was gone. And there are not many folks out there that offer Joe a lot of encouragement. Oh, Mary is a great wife, but she has never really understood how tough being a cop can sometimes be. Joe's boss, Bill, is an okay guy, but he has favorites in the department, and Joe isn't one of them. The media coverage about cops often is very negative. Oh, sometimes a church does an "appreciation day" for law enforcement or something, but for the most part the community, especially the politicians, just seem to take law enforcement for granted.

But, Joe doesn't really care anymore. He is playing for an audience of one. He is convinced he is doing the job God has called him to do. And if it is the job God has called Joe to do, it is better to do that, to be a cop, than to be a missionary in Africa, a coach of an NFL team or even better than being President of the United States. And if God is pleased with what Joe is doing, he is starting to realize, it really doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. And that has brought Joe, more freedom and more joy, than almost anything else in his life. The focus of Joe's life has become very simple. His goal is this: Whatever I do, at home, at work, wherever I am, I want to do it for the glory of God. I want to do it in a way that pleases Him. Oh, I will fail plenty of times. And I am thankful that because of Jesus, God will forgive me and give me another chance. But that is my goal, to glorify God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*—to God alone be the glory. Friend, if, by God's grace, that is your goal in life, I can pretty much guarantee you will find freedom and joy along the path, and in the end, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus, you will experience eternal life. May the Lord enable us to believe and live this truth today and in all the days ahead.