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**Series: Reformation Sunday**  
**Message: The Five Solas**

**Transcribed Message**  
**October 29, 2017**  
**Galatians 3:11**

It is this coming Wednesday, that if you have a calendar that has any religious notations on it, will mark November 1<sup>st</sup> as being Reformation Sunday. More likely, it might say All Faiths Sunday, which makes October 31<sup>st</sup> then the Eve of All Saints Day or All Hallowed Eve day or Halloween as we sometimes call it. It was back in 1517 on October 31<sup>st</sup> that a monk by the name of Martin Luther did find himself so agitated in his soul and so agitated in his heart that he drew up 95 points that he felt were worthy of discussion and debate in the public forum. He took them to the place that you did when you wanted that to happen and he nailed them to the door of the church in Wittenberg. These became known as the 95 Theses. In what was a very dark time, God used the spark of that event to ignite what we know and what we call today the Great Reformation. It is because we are at the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that that I decided that we needed to do something a little bit special today and that's why we're remembering and celebrating today as Reformation Sunday. It was 500 years ago on October 31<sup>st</sup> that Luther, moved by God, acknowledged that there were many things that were wrong within the life of the church. We're going to break away for a week from our Sermon on the Mount series and we're going to look at Reformation Sunday. My presentation will be a little different this morning than normal, just by virtue of the material we're going to be looking at, but I trust that it will be an encouragement to you.

Here's what I'd like to do. There are three things I want to give you. Five things about the Reformation that I think we should know. I want to give you five reformers that we should be familiar with and then we'll spend the rest of our time looking at the Five Solas that are really the heart of the Reformation. As you think of that, it is the heart cry of the Reformation that is captured in those Five Solas. It is that we are justified by faith in God, in Christ alone, by grace alone, for God's glory alone, and all of that is revealed to us in Scripture alone. So let's start there.

Five things that we should know about the Great Reformation. It was first of all the biggest upheaval in church history. What happened during those days changed the church forever. In 1054, the church had gone through a significant split and in 1054 the church divided into two parts. The eastern part was the Eastern Orthodox Church and in the west we had the church of Rome, the Roman Catholic Church. That was certainly a big event, but it wasn't anything on the magnitude of what was coming in part because of the Great Reformation. If you're a Protestant this morning and you don't know why you are a Protestant, then this is really for you. If you're Protestant and you know why you're a Protestant, then this is all about the great Reformation.

The second thing we need to know is it brought the laity back into the church. The word "laity" simply is talking about people like us. It's just talking about every day common people. It brought them back into the life of the church because people didn't have the Bible in their own language, because the Bible itself was so inaccessible, so unavailable. Whether it was in a language that you could read or not, you just didn't have Bibles available. The liturgy of the church was in a language that most people didn't understand because there was this huge gap between the clergy and the laity to where they were viewed by the church and in distinctively different ways. All of those things added up to the fact that the everyday person felt very detached, very isolated, and very much not a part of what was going on in the life of the church. In that sense, the church collectively was in a time we would describe as spiritual darkness.

The third thing we should know about the Reformation is it impacted the life of the church and impacted life beyond the church and everything around us. Think in terms of the impact of the great Reformation. It certainly impacted individuals. It impacted families. It had an impact on marriage. It had an impact on government, politics, education, music, the arts, missions, economics and work ethics. Just go down the list. It's hard to think of an area of life that was not impacted by the Great Reformation. So significant was its influence and its impact.

Fourthly, not all of the events of the Reformation are praiseworthy. The leaders of the Reformation were after all mere men. We know the saying: the best of men are men at best. When you study these men and you appreciate and are thankful for and in many ways are amazed at what they did and how God used them and their gifts their

capacities and their abilities, we look at that and we're thankful for all of them. But at the same time, we acknowledge that they were mere men and they made mistakes. They did things they shouldn't have done. Since we're focusing more on Luther this morning because of the 500th anniversary, we need to acknowledge in particular that Luther was a man who said some very egregious things that were anti-Semitic in nature. When you read certain writings of Luther with regard to Jewish people, there not only is within his heart seemingly a strong hostility, you can read those things and it's hard to think that he doesn't hate these people. We can offer a number of explanations, but at the end of the day it sounds like excuses. So we're just going to simply say this. We're going to acknowledge that Luther's legacy is harmed by his anti-Semitic views, his anti-Jewish views. We're going to acknowledge that God used him in an amazing way, but we would repudiate his anti-Semitic views and say that it was absolutely wrong.

The fifth thing that obviously we need to know about the Great Reformation are the Five Solas. We're going to look at those in just a moment. How about five key reformers? There are many things that we can mention here, and I'm taking already some mathematical liberties, some editorial liberties when I tell you that there are five. There are five points on your outline, but we're actually going to talk about 8 people. I'm going to start off and tell you we need to be familiar with John Wycliffe and John Hus. John Wycliffe. His ministry and impact was in England. He was called the Morning Star of the Reformation, which gives you the idea that here's the first star that shines in the morning, and a couple of hundred years before Luther there's the impact in the life of a man named John Wycliffe. The reason that's important is because Wycliffe took the Latin Bible and he translated it in to English so that it was available to people. Because he did that, he was vilified by the Roman church and he was excommunicated by the Roman church. His bones were even dug up by the Roman church and burned and scattered into the river so much was their hatred of him. John Hus took that fervor to the mainland to Prague, to Czechoslovakia, and it was there that his influence and his impact caused him to be martyred for his faith.

The second two guys are Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon. Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon. They go together. You almost shouldn't mention Luther without Melanchthon or Melanchthon without Luther. Luther obviously was in Germany as was

Melanchthon. We're already aware of the 95 theses that he nailed to the door and forever changed history. Melanchthon was on the other side of this. He was kind of the organizer. He was the PR. He was more of the detail person, the genius of a man behind Luther. Luther was often harsh and sometimes he spoke rashly and he just said what he thought. Melanchthon would come along and take those words and he'd soften them and present them in a little a different way, a little better way. But those two men were giants in and of themselves.

The next that we mention is Ulrich Zwingli. Ulrich Zwingli was in Switzerland. The thing about Zwingli that we want to remember is he's the one who really put expository preaching, verse by verse preaching, front and center. He came to his church one Sunday morning and he announced to them that he was going to begin preaching verse by verse through the book of Matthew. He preached his way verse by verse through the book of Matthew. And when they finished the book of Matthew, he said now we're going to preach verse by verse through the book of Galatians. When they finished Galatians, whatever book that he went to next, Zwingli brought before his people an expository understanding of the Word of God. He also did away with the Latin mass which was obviously a very big deal.

The next mentioned is John Calvin. John Calvin was in Switzerland as well. By the time Calvin was 27 years old, he had written a volume of systematic theology that is still read and studied today called the *Institutes*, a voluminous detailed work, an amazing work by a 27-year-old student of Scripture. You read those writings of Calvin and you're amazed at the ability, the skills, the knowledge that God had given this young man and his obvious study of the Word. Some would argue that Calvin is the most influential of all of the reformers.

Then finally John Knox. John Knox is in Scotland. It was said that the Queen Mary was more afraid of John Knox's prayers than of any army that was to come against her. He was a disruptor. He was a bull in the china shop. It was said of Knox that he would do 30 minutes of calm Biblical exposition followed by wild pulpit pounding application. Very similar to what happens at Covenant Community Church. When I'm not here. You can imagine the fire in this man's soul as he brought the Word to his people and wanted so desperately for them to understand the truth of God's Word.

There's five things about the Reformation. There is seven different reformers. There are others that we could've listed as well.

But let's turn our attention for the rest of our time to the Five Solas of the Reformation because this is the heart and the soul of what happened in this period of time. As you look at those different phrases, those are five different Latin phrases that came to define the Great Reformation. It is in those phrases, while they were not born in that exact time period, they were not named or listed in this way until hundreds of years later, they were both the cause of the Reformation and the effect of the Reformation. So it is that we find in these the great truths that drove these reformers and brought the church out of darkness into the light of God's Word. The word sola simply means only. So we have these five solas of our faith.

In one question, the question of questions, you have the most important issue that the reformers were grappling with. It is the most important question that we could ever ask today, and that question very simply was how can an unrighteous person stand before a righteous God? Every one of us are sinners by birth and by choice. How is it that we could possibly stand before a holy and righteous God? The church of Rome was giving one answer to that question. The reformers were giving a very different answer to that question. It is in their answer that we find the blessing of eternal life. If you answer that question correctly all is well. If you answer that question incorrectly the Bible would say that we face eternal separation and condemnation.

So let's start. Let's start where I think we should start and that is answering that question how is it that an unrighteous person can stand before a holy and righteous God? We're going to start with Sola Scriptura. Sola Scriptura says this is our only authority. It is often called the Formal Principle of the Great Reformation. It's called the Formal Principle because it gives form to everything else that happened in the Reformation. It is really the foundation of all that took place in this period of time. When the reformers spoke of Sola Scriptura, they were expressing their conviction, their belief, their concern that the Bible's authority is the only true and absolute authority. The Bible stands alone with regard to all authority in our life. It stands apart from the church. It stands apart from the Pope and the traditions of the church and the councils of the church, even less our own personal intimations, our own personal subjective feelings. It

is the Scripture alone that is our absolute authority established by God to give us light and direction in every area of our life.

God obviously has given us other means of authority. Within the church, we have the authority of the elders. Within the state, we have the authority of government. Within the family and the home, we have the authority of parents. We know and we recognize other authorities, but Sola Scriptura says that this is the ultimate authority. This is the authority that we fall back on. This is the authority that we go to see what these other authorities are saying and if what they're saying is in alignment with this one. Any time any other authority in our life does not line up with the Word of God, Peter said it best. I must obey God rather than man. The Bible judges us. We don't judge the Bible. We live in a culture and at a time when even in the church we're bringing the cultural issues into the church and we're letting the cultural issues not come under the authority of the Word. We let the culture judge the Word. God says no. That is reserved for Scripture alone.

In 1521 when Martin Luther is called before the Diet of Worms (and who would want to have a diet of worms anyway?), diet is assembly and Worms was a place in Germany. In 1521, Pope Leo had said of Luther that he was a heretic, that he needed to be condemned. In addition the Papal Bull said as much, and so when Luther appears before this diet, this assembly, the bishop had laid out on the tables in front of him all of his writings. The Papal Bull declared that he was now to be viewed as a heretic and he was condemned and he was to be excommunicated by the church. The question before Luther that day was whether those writings were his, and if he recanted all of the errors written in the books. This is what Luther said: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures by clear reason, for I do not trust either the Pope or in councils alone, yet since it is well-known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen." You know what? I think we face similar challenges today.

On the one hand, we might very well hear people saying what Luther said of his time. I go to church to hear what my priest or pastor says and I believe him. Or like

Calvin who complained before the Reformation, preaching was part trivial pursuit. You didn't know he named that game back then. It was part trivial pursuit and part storytelling. Today instead of expository preaching filling pulpits in our land, we have a dumbing down continuing in which we don't really want to get too deep into the doctrines of the Word of God. We don't want to get too invested in what the Scriptures give to us by way of the meat of the Word for fear that people may not understand or maybe be offended or put off by it. We end up with the church of Biblically illiterate people. That's what we have. We have, as a church today, people who hold to the highest view of Scripture. Survey after survey shows that. People believe this is the Word of God. They just don't live it. They believe the Bible. They just don't want to be under the authority of the Scripture. 30% of teenagers in the survey in evangelical churches did not know the right answer to why we celebrate Easter. That's why I call it Resurrection Sunday, by the way. Because if you call it Resurrection Sunday you know what you're celebrating. You're celebrating the resurrection. How is it that that would even be possible? Because they don't hear the Word of God taught. They don't hear the Scriptures expounded in the way God intended. Therefore, we come up with the idea that the Bible is largely inaccessible and too hard to understand. So we don't read it. That's the very mindset that led to the power of the Roman church over its people. The Bible is too hard for you to understand. Let me tell you what to believe. Let me tell you what it means. People turned to their priest to be told what it was that the Bible means. All they basically want to know is what does it mean for me and how does it make me happy in my life? That's what we get today. That is what we get today in way too many churches. One of the greatest gifts that God has given to us is right here. 66 inspired inerrant authoritative books that make up the Bible. That's why we said in the fall we need to be people of the Book. We need to be reading the Book. We need to be in the Book because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It's profitable for us. So they started off with this formal principle Sola Scriptura. Scripture alone.

The second sola is Solus Christus. Solus Christus. Our only mediator. In that period of time, it was the view that the priest and the pastor had a special relationship with God, a relationship that was better than the average person. Everybody would go to the priest or pastor, and it was in the Roman church the sacraments that were offered

by the priest that would make it possible for that person to have access to God. I think for the first time in all of my life I got an email this week speaking about Reformation Sunday. I got an email this week and it started off with "Dear Father." and it was not from my children. It was from a church organization that evidently thought one of the C's in Covenant was something other than what it was, and they thought I was a priest and therefore they were addressing me as Father Tschetter. Well, that speaks to not my age I trust, but that is simply to a mistaken identity. It's easy to think that our age is somehow unique. Within all of the pluralism of our time and with all of the religious ideas, it's easy to think that we're different than any other period of time, but that's not true. The period of time right before the Reformation called the Renaissance had very many of these same ideas floating around -- that everybody has a good idea and everybody has a way to God, therefore Christ only, Christ alone really isn't necessary. There are many paths that lead to God. We just get on those paths and we call them by different names. What the Reformation did in Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus was a direct assault on the idea that there could be faith in humanity to somehow save itself. It was a direct assault on the idea that God could be useful to you but in the end you could get there if He would just offer you a little bit of help. Luther came along and his heart cry was Christ alone. Jesus was the only way to know God as our Father. Jesus was the means that God had given to avoid the wrath that was to come.

We're in trouble today. In a recent survey, 35% of evangelical seminary students did not think it was absolutely necessary to put faith in Christ alone for salvation, that there were other ways that that could happen. Are you kidding me? 35% in evangelical seminaries. Mainline seminaries have believed that for decades. It is even now in seminaries that train men and women for ministry that even there we find this creeping sense of we can do this ourselves. George Barna says the same thing that 35% of evangelical Protestant churchgoers have no problem with this statement: God will save all good people when they die regardless of whether they trusted in Christ or not. RC Sproul said this: "To the degree that people think they are good enough to pass divine inspection and are oblivious to the holiness of God, to that extent they will not see Christ as necessary." Do you see what the Reformation did? It focused on the cross of Christ alone. It focused on Christ alone. It reminds us of Peter's statement in Acts 4: There is

no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. There is only one name. Christ alone.

This brings us to the third of the solas. Sola Gratia. Our only method. The reason we must stay with the Scriptures is because it's the only place that we read that God has given to us an undeserved, unearned salvation. It is of the grace of God that this comes to us. It is by grace alone. So that in saying that, the reformers were saying there are no human methods. There are no human techniques. There are no human strategies apart from the divine work of God's Spirit in our life, using the truth of Christ alone to awaken within us the realization that all of this comes to us not by merit or by works or by human effort. It comes to us by grace alone. It is only that that can release us from the bondage of sin and bring to us an understanding of what it means to be spiritually alive.

Many of you remember in the "Sound of Music", Maria, when she realized that the captain had romantic interest in her, she said this: "Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could. So somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must've done something good." That's the way a lot of people think about their spiritual journey. They believe that there is something within themselves that they can save themselves, or for sure something that they can offer to God and that they can partner with Him. With a little assistance, with a little help and a little nudge, they too can believe. But listen, the gospel is not lodged anywhere within us. The gospel isn't in our heart. The gospel isn't in our mind. The gospel isn't in our emotions. The gospel isn't in our will. The gospel is a revealed truth that comes to us through the Word of God. When it first comes to us, Paul says in Romans 1 our initial response oftentimes is that it's foolish, that it can't be believed. Who would ever think that salvation is by grace alone? There has got to be something that I can do. There has got to be some way that I can be of help.

Remember the story of the guy who fell off the cliff and as he was falling grabbed the one branch that was sticking out of the side. As he hangs there and he realizes there's no way he's getting back up on top of that ledge, he finally calls out to see if there was anybody up there that can help him. Surprisingly, a voice booms out and says yes, I'm up here. I can help you. But the first thing you have to do is let go of that branch. As the man considers what that means, he calls out and says, is there anybody

else up there? Because that's what we want to do, don't we? We want to offer something to God. We want to help him. Saving ourselves looks so much better than resting in the grace of God, in the kindness of God, the mercy of God, the compassion of God. Many in the medieval church believed that if they would do their part, God would do his. They believed that they could offer something to God. The popular phrase of Luther's day was God will not deny His grace to those who do what they can. You know what our phrase is today? God helps those who help themselves. Do you know what? Over half of people in evangelical churches believe that is somewhere in the Bible. 80% when that was read to them did not initially think there was anything wrong theologically with that statement that God helps those who help themselves.

This belief in human nature so prominent in Luther's day is what called for then this fourth sola. Sola Fide. Fide is our only means of salvation. Christ alone. Grace alone. Faith alone. The reformers never tired of saying we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Luther is the one who said it is justification by faith that is the standing doctrine. It is the truth by which a church either stands or falls. To the extent that this church or any church is committed to and believes that we are justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, to that extent we stand. To the extent that we don't believe that, we're in decline and falling. The reformers called this the Material Principle. So we have the Formal Principle in Sola Scriptura because it gives form to everything else. Justification by faith was called the Material Principle because it was the materially substantive thing that drove the Great Reformation.

Remember in Genesis 15:6? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. Abraham believed and God put into his account the very righteousness that God requires. His righteousness to require. Justification is a declaration of God based on the work of Christ. Justification is the act of God which He declares sinners to be righteous because Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone is God's means of salvation.

What did the Roman church teach? When Luther put this forward, that we're justified by faith alone, what did the Roman church say in response? In the Council of Trent, which was the response to the Great Reformation on the part of those who were protesting, the Roman church said in the Council in the sixth session in Canon 30: "If

anyone says that after the reception of grace that there is justification, and the sins are remitted and eternal death is blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no death of temporary punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be an anathema.” That was the Roman church's response to justification by faith. To put it another way was if you believe that you are saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone you will be damned. You will be consigned to hell.

Scripture teaches that very truth. Romans 3:28. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the work of the law. Or Romans 5:1. Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Or Galatians 3:11. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law for the righteous shall live by faith. That is the testimony of a standing or falling church.

Then the last sola. Soli Deo Gloria. It's the glue that holds all the others together. If you don't have the other four, you never get to this one. It's this one that really is then ultimately the unifying force. The world is full of all kinds of ambitious people. Romans 15: “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel word so Christ was known.” He spoke clearly and plainly about the gospel of grace, about Christ alone, about faith alone, grace alone.

If I were to ask you, what is the ambition of the church today? What would your observations be? If you just observed church life in America today, what would you say is the driving ambition of the church? I would suggest it might be any number of answers to that. But we have to ask is it to please God or is it to please men? Is it to please God to bring glory to Him or to ourselves? Is our happiness and our joy found in the glory of God alone? Or is our joy and our happiness found in other things and even other people? The Westminster Confession is the one that asked what's the chief end of man? Why are we even here? We're here to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Is our worship a form of personal entertainment based on feelings for that moment? Or is it really God glorified praise that focuses on Him? Do we gather with one ambition in mind, that God would be glorified through everything that we do and say? Or are we seeking and pursuing something for ourselves? Robert Schuller, who died a number of years ago, actually made the statement that the Reformation erred because it was God-

centered rather than man-centered. That kind of thinking permeates the church in America today.

Listen to this statement: “Many historians look back at the Reformation and wonder at its far-reaching influence in transforming culture. The work ethic, public education, civic and economic betterment, the revival of music, of the arts, a sense of all of life being related somehow to God and His glory. These effects cause historians to observe with a sense of irony. How is it that a theology of sin and grace and of the sovereignty of God over the helplessness of human beings and an emphasis on salvation by grace apart from works could be the catalyst for such a transformation?” It does cause the perspective from the human viewpoint to be totally without a clue as to how that could happen. And yet we know it is the very thing that God planned from the beginning. The reformers didn't seek to create a new church. They weren't trying to be revolutionaries or bring about some cataclysmic break with the church of Rome. But they did put the gospel first. They did believe in Sola Scripture and they did proclaim Christ alone. They did believe that it was by grace alone and it was by faith alone and all to be done for the glory of God alone. My friend, when you put those five things together, that is what you get. How is it that we could expect the world that we live in to view with any sense of seriousness the glory of God if the church of Jesus Christ does not have that as its sole motivating force? It is this that the reformers have given to us.

I close with this statement by Eugene Rice: “All the more the Reformation's views of God and humanity measured the gulf between the secular imagination of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 16<sup>th</sup> century's intoxication with the majesty of God.” Here we are with our secular imagination, pursuing all kinds of things that bring happiness to ourselves. Here are the reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and their intoxication is all about the majesty of God. We can exercise only historical sympathy to try to understand how it was that the most brilliant intelligences of an entire epic found a total and supreme liberty in abandoning human weakness to the omnipotence of God. With Paul we say: For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To God be glory forever and ever, amen.

What do we take away? The five solas of the essence of the gospel. When we embrace them, we embrace the gospel. When we proclaim them, we proclaim the

gospel. When we live them, we're living out the power of the gospel. All of this depends on one thing. It all depends on knowing the answer to the question: how is it that I as a sinner can stand before and be accepted by the holy and righteous God? The answer of Scripture is in Ephesians 2: "For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God." What is the gift of God? Our salvation and very faith by which we believe is the gift of God, not of works lest any of us should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

That, my friends, is the means of entrance into this next act of worship in which we focus all of our attention literally on the five solas. As we come to the elements this morning, we come because based on Scripture. We understand what Christ has done for us. We understand that it comes to us by God's grace. We understand that we receive it simply by faith. and it all redounds to the glory of God.

If you know Jesus as your personal Savior this morning, we invite you to take part in these elements as they're passed. If you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior, we are thrilled that you're here. We want you to come back. We want you to be a part of the life of our church. As you move forward on this spiritual journey, we want and our prayer is going to be that you understand what it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is by faith alone. But we would simply ask that you not take the elements as they're passed. This is an act of worship for every child of God because this is literally the cross being memorialized before us. We do this in memory of what Jesus did for us.

Let me pray for us. We will close out our morning this Reformation Sunday around the cross and around these elements. Let's pray. Father god, thank You for these brave men and women who forged forward in the face of great opposition and who did so believing, Father, that the gospel of Your grace comes to us without human effort. It comes to us because of what Jesus did for us. So we proclaim this morning Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone. We thank You in Jesus's name, Amen.