

The Reformation in Biblical Perspective
“The Sola of the Solas”
Luke 10:38–42
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Let's start by looking at Luke 10:38–42 which says [38] *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. [39] And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. [40] But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” [41] But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”* The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Here are the five *solas* of the Reformation. *Sola Gratia* is we are saved by grace alone. *Sola Fide* is by faith alone. *Solus Christus* is in Christ alone. *Soli Deo Gloria* is we are saved for the glory of God alone which is how we enjoy Him forever. Lastly, is *Sola Scriptura* which is the Scripture alone is our authoritative rule of faith and practice. I want to make a proposal/observation to you that I think Biblically is extremely important as we seek the Lord in our day and time, knowing we need an awakening, a revived church to have an awakening and a reformation to have a revived church to have an awakening, just as God graciously provided in the 15th and 16th century. This awakening was first brought through and to its leadership.

As you look at the five *solas* it is my conviction that four of them very clearly flow together but there is one of them that stands apart because of its crucial pinnacle importance. In other words, of the *solas* there is one of material importance. What do I mean by that? If I'm a sculptor and I'm going to make a sculpture I need instruments, maybe a picture of what I'm going to sculpt, a pattern, chisels and all of that but there is one thing that is material. The material thing is that you can't have a sculpture without stone or marble for it's of material importance. So one of these *solas* was of material importance in Reformation. I also believe it's important not only to understand what happened then but what happened now.

When the Reformation comes at the end of the 15th century and 16th century it is in a historical context. For instance an important role in this Reformation was Martin Luther as he nailed the 95 Theses to the church at Wittenberg but the constellation of reformers was extraordinary with people like Knox, Latimer, Ridley, and Cranmer with some of the secondary reformers being Milinkton, Basin, Goodman, Bucer. Yet we will focus on this moment with Martin Luther.

Luther was born in 1483 in the midst of a Holy Roman Empire that we neither holy nor Roman or an empire. It was dissipating and didn't bear any resemblance to its name at all. The very powerful Emperor Maximilian I was about to disappear and there was a big discussion into the turn of the 16th century as to who would replace him. There were four candidates – Frederick the Wise from Germany, King Francis I from France and King Charles I from Spain who wasn't even a Spaniard and King Henry VIII of England. The first ballot was Frederick the Wise but he declined which ends up Charles the V and is part of the dynamic that takes place.

Martin Luther was born in a small mining town called Eisleben where his father is moving up from peasantry to owning a mine and six foundries with Luther's mother,

Margarethe. Back then only 50 percent of children survived their infancy but Luther does. Luther is sent to Eisenach for education and enters the University of Erfurt at age 17. He finishes his undergraduate, bachelor's and master's work within three years as he is on his way to being a lawyer. He is a sensitive man who is looking out over life.

This time in Luther's life is really an amazing time. Around this time Michelangelo is turning out his work in Rome as a painter, sculptor and poet. When Luther was 9 years old Columbus sailed across the ocean blue in 1492. Around this time Gutenberg invents the printing press. What is really interesting during this time is what is happening in the heart of Martin Luther. In 1505 he almost dies from a wound in his leg and becomes very aware of his mortality.

As he was on his way home he was almost struck by a lightning bolt and cries out to his patron saint. Because he grew up in a mining family and town the patron saint of the miners was Saint Anna, mother of Mary. This was not his conversion but he cries out "Saint Anna if you will save me I will become a monk!" Why would he want to become a monk? Also during this period of time there is not only corruption in the culture for sexual immorality is rampant along with sexual promiscuity and sexual perversion but all the governments were tyrannical with some being less than others. There was oppression particularly peasant and growing movements of nationalisms. There were intermural wars that kept breaking out everywhere. There were plagues, fevers, violence and death.

For 800 years the church has descended into apostasy. The Gospel has been lost to ritualism, legalism and the doctrines under sacerdotalism where the church saves through its priesthood and its sacraments. Therefore good money making schemes had developed like the selling of indulgences to pay for building campaigns and various things back in Rome. Then there was the corruption of Simony which is where people buy positions of power in the church. Prince Albert of Brandenburg bought two bishops and an archbishop and was given the right to raise money through the selling of indulgences.

Prince Albert brought in the top indulgence seller around and his name was Johann Tetzel who had a drama team and a sermon he would preach. He basically would say something like this; 'How can you let your relatives go to purgatory?' His reference had to do with those who died with blemishes who had not done enough works to be saved who went to this place called purgatory to purge away their blemishes. According to Tetzel you could get them out of purgatory with a relic and an offering. So the doctrines of penance, absolution through penance and indulgences authorized by papals and the selling of those indulgences, fifty percent would go to Prince Albert and the other fifty went to Pope Leo X. Prince Albert went into debt to buy his position so this fifty percent was going to pay his debt off and Leo used his fifty percent to pay for his building project. This is called Simony. Simony came from Simon the Magician who tried to buy something from the church (Acts 8). This was rampant in those days throughout the church everywhere.

So why would Luther say in 1505 that he wanted to be a monk? He is a lawyer. As a lawyer he knows he can't get right with God because he is a sinner and God must not only judge sin but every sin. God can't let my sins go and he doesn't see all this relic, indulgence, works stuff in the Bible so he gets no assurance from it. His legal mind went to work and basically said there is no way he can be saved. In fact, his sense of his inability to be saved was so enormous that when he did his first communion service he froze at the thought of a sinner actually handling the blood and body of Christ through the doctrine of transubstantiation. He couldn't even get the words out of his mouth. When his own father ridiculed him he said to his father 'how can I in

my own sinfulness hold the body and blood of Christ' and he actually believed that. So his soul was racked. So if you get saved through the priesthood what better way to make sure you get saved than to become a priest. So Luther goes into his monkery.

Martin Luther once said, "If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I. Christ was given, not for picayune and imaginary transgressions, but for mountainous sins; not for one or two, but for all; not for sins that can be discarded, but for sins that are stubbornly ingrained." He would sleep very few hours and one could hardly believe the self-flagellation he went through and the things we would abstain from. Finally his mentor Johann von Staupitz asked him to come with some real sins because the ones he was coming up with were trivial. Luther was confessing every sin every day that he could think of because they weren't trivial to him. He did not feel as if he could be right.

So Luther took a trip to Rome in 1510 and saw all of the immorality of the clerics and became disillusioned. He went back home as he was working through all these issues. Praise God that when Luther decided to go into a monastery he went to a tough one, for he went into an Augustinian one and had a mentor Johann von Staupitz who was well read on Augustinian theology which was a theology of salvation by grace. In fact, it was the last church father that really preached it. Then his mentor had Luther teach from the book of Romans, Galatians, Psalms and Hebrews.

As he taught these books he began to deal with it and in 1515 he was in the deepest conviction of his soul as he came up to Romans 1:16–17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who **believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the **righteousness of God** is revealed from **faith for faith**, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* It is God's righteousness that is given and received by faith. Luther wrote, 'It was a moment I was born again!' He began to write what he believed.

He wrote 95 propositions which were not the same as his 95 Theses. Those 95 propositions boiled down to this; you are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. What is grace? It is the extension of God's unmerited love to the life of a sinner who is not seeking or doesn't deserve it but relentlessly pursues Him. God's grace gives you the instrument whereby you lay hold of Christ. Why would God do this? He made us and saved us for His glory alone and in that is our joy forever so that we can enjoy Him and glorify Him forever. It is those four *solas* that come out of Luther's need to know how to be right with God that begin to fill his heart, his soul, his classroom and his students.

He is then sent from the University of Erfurt to the University of Wittenberg under von Staupitz and eventually there will be these dinners where they will have table talks on these great truths Luther has been learning through his teaching of these books of the Bible. So the Gospel is now reclaimed from the facade of ritualism, legalism and all the things that had clouded the work of the Gospel. Then he hears that Johann Tetzel is over the river setting up camp where all of Luther's people at the church of Wittenberg are going over to hear him and Luther says 'Enough of this!' And begins to take on the doctrines of penance, indulgence, relics and all of that in which false assurance is given and the manipulation of people who seemingly could hear that little jingle that Tetzel had put together; 'Every time a coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs.' How can you hold your money back when you can spring out your grandfather or grandmother or relative?

With all this manipulation Luther is moved, not to a revolution, to a reformation of the church. He actually thinks it will take place if he can just get a debate. So in the language of

the academics he writes out 95 Theses and nails them to the community bulletin board in Wittenberg on All Saints Day. So if saints are saints by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone then what a day to nail the 95 Theses to confront the indulgences, manipulations and machinations that are heretical. The nailing of the 95 Theses was a way Luther invited a debate with the theologians. He thinks he will get a nice private debate. His students see it and translate it into the vernacular German of the day by going to the Guttenberg press to print them and in two weeks they are spread all over Germany. It is unstoppable what is about to happen.

Here's the problem. They can't go to war with Germany because Germany had all the money and man power because they are fighting a caliphate that is coming up from Islam up through Austria and Spain. The Pope wants them to do away with this beer drinking German monk (Luther). Even though they call him a wild boar in the woods they say they can't do that. They begin to develop some forums and debates. In 1518 one is being held in Heidelberg, the next year is Augsburg, then the next year in Leipzig and in this Luther brings forth this glorious reclamation of the Gospel and debates the various issues with Cardinal Cajetan, Johann Eck and Thomas Eck, etc. Some of them he does better than others but basically he is winning the day.

Every time he comes to one of these cities the crowds come out. He is like a rock star and people are starting to read his sermons and everything else. It is amazing what is happening right now in his life. He gets more and more popular and now they really can't burn him but finally Charles the V who takes over as the Holy Roman Emperor says there is going to be a diet and it will be in Worms where Luther would appear before what is known as Diet of Worms. It was a gathering of all the power of the church and the state into one place and it will be focused on Martin Luther. He has already been identified with John Huss who was burned because of his positions and I'll tell you more about that in the next study on the Reformation. The threat and decrees are out there to burn Luther but Frederick the Wise gets to save conduct for him and then they bring the challenge to Luther.

The challenge to Luther is when they ask him to recant or revoke these commentaries he has written. Luther asks them to show him from the Scripture where he was wrong. The answer back is no debate, it's just one word – recant. Luther then asks for 24 hours to think about it. He goes back to his cloister and the prayer he prayed was overwhelming. Basically he said 'Oh God I'm surrounded in a world of devils, be my strength for my adversaries are greater than me. Be my fortress, be my buckler, be my shield.' The next day as he is pressed for his answer, he simply hears what they say and says 'Unless I am convinced by Scripture I cannot recant. My conscience is bound by the Word of God and for my conscience to go against that is neither right nor safe. Here I stand I can do no other, God help me.'

In that is the material cause of the Reformation – *Sola Scriptura*. That is how you know that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and for the glory of God you were made, saved and sustained for the Bible has revealed it to you. The Bible is our foundation. It is the Scripture alone that is our only rule of faith and practice. It is the sola of all the solas for the others you would never know without the Scripture. No matter what the state or church says, the Scripture says it's true. Those truths are taught in the Word of God and that is my only rule of faith and practice. That is the blessing of the Reformation that comes down to us.

The text I read from Luke 10 is an amazing moment in the life and ministry of Jesus. As He is going toward Jerusalem He comes to this little village of Bethany to the home of two sisters and a brother – Mary, Martha and Lazarus. From the wording of the text it seems like Martha owns the home but they all live there. As soon as Jesus comes in she begins to engage in the glorious ministry of hospitality and everyone knows that Christian hospitality is important.

In the midst of it Martha is upset with Mary because Mary is not helping her but is sitting down at the feet of Jesus listening to Him as He opens up the Scriptures to her.

Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her and Jesus says to Martha “*Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.*” Jesus says to her she is really distracted fundamentally and materially yet only one thing is of primary importance for the life you want to live and Mary has made that choice. It the Word of God heard, embraced and obeyed. When Jesus uses the word distracted you are distracted from something to something. The problem with Martha’s situation was not what she was doing, what she was distracted to but what she was willing to lay aside to do it.

There are many valid initiatives and needs in this world that the church of Jesus Christ must respond to and we will respond to it as a message of common grace and a message of redeeming grace, but one thing of material importance that undergirds everything, tells us what everything is and directs us, is the Word of God. In other words, Martha, you can’t reach out and love anyone until you make sure Jesus has reached you with His Word. Your hospitality will become meaningless as an end in itself if you don’t maintain the primacy of God’s Word in your heart and life. To reach anyone you must make sure that Christ by His Spirit and with His Word is reaching you. Never get distracted from the Word because it is the only rule of what you believe and what you practice including hospitality. If you get your hospitality divorced from My Word it is only a matter of time until your hospitality becomes your salvation or your savior or you begin to define it for yourself or for others instead of Me.

How do I give a cup of cold water in Jesus’ Name? I know how to give it apart from Jesus’ Name but to give it in His Name I need the Word of God to tell me where it goes, what it’s there for and how to give it in His Name. That is what you must do. So here is your takeaway from the basic sola of the primacy of Scripture.

The takeaway is to know our mission, message and ministry as a Christian and as the church, to embrace our mission, message and ministry and to stay on mission, message and ministry the *Sola Scriptura* is crucial. The Scripture alone is our only infallible, inerrant and sufficient authority for faith and practice. The Scripture defines our mission, message and ministry. It is not the need of the culture that defines our mission or our message or our ministry.

Look at all of the issues in the 16th century. A landscape changing, culture changing took place but nowhere did the church declare itself on mission to transform the culture. The church reclaimed from the Word of God its message – *Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide* – the power and authority of the life changing Gospel. It stayed on mission which was to go and make disciples of all the nations. Start with your own but don’t stop there. Stay in ministry – worship, evangelism, discipleship, growing deep, growing out and reproducing yourself. That’s how the landscape of the culture transformed.

If we decide we are the guardians and transformers of the culture then it’s a matter of time for the needs of the culture to dictate to us the message in order for us to be accepted by the culture. No one wants to speak to the issue of the sanctity of marriage. I live in a culture that is disintegrating, disconnecting and in a death spiral. I see gender confusion, sexual promiscuity, sexual perversion, marriage perversion, and the disintegration of the family. I see the rising of the –isms, like nationalism, racism. Does the church have a voice to it? Absolutely. Does the church have individuals who reach out in ministry to people and the consequences of it? Absolutely, but the churches mission and message in order to do what it needs to do is to stay on

mission and that is to go and make disciples of all the nations with one message and that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The culture doesn't want us on mission. They are more than happy for us to become a piece of the cultural furniture. They say we need a little religion so bring it on but for us to what God calls us to do then the culture doesn't want us on mission or message or in ministry. To them preaching is foolish. Prayer is stupid to the culture. If we think our job is to be the guardians and transforming agents, I actually think we do transform cultures but its consequential and not our mission. My mission is not marriage, sexuality, etc. but I will teach all those things because I'm on mission with the Gospel to make disciples. When you make disciples you teach them to observe all that God has commanded you but no one need becomes our mission. Our mission according to the Scripture is to make disciples of all the nations.

These are disciples who reach up in worship, who reproduce themselves in personal evangelism, who reach out to others and make disciples and who do Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice. During our recent mission's conference we saw the couple that was evangelized and now have a ministry to make more disciples. We saw the college athlete who was getting disciplined who now has 100 young men that are at their wits end and are now being disciplined in a mentoring program that this athlete started. Why is this happening? It is because the church is doing its mission and message.

It makes me think of the work my wife and I recently have done in our yard where we pulled up weeds and all and planted new things with my comment to her 'look how small this is' and she said 'but watch what it does.' Watch what happens when the church starts worshipping, reproducing themselves in personal evangelism, small groups and deeds of love, mercy and justice. Watch the tentacles goes throughout Birmingham, Alabama. Through our youth group and college ministries we are seeing the age groups of 30 somethings out there with ministries because they were evangelized and disciple and the tentacles begin to move out.

I want to speak to everything I need to speak to in this culture. I can't wait to see the ministries of some of you as you move into this culture. Here is what we are committed to do. We are going to stay on message. The world will call it a scandal for they will be scandalized by our message but in truth and love without anger at them, we are going to bring our message. It's the Gospel. God loves you. He saves sinners. You can be right with God. We are going to stay on mission and that means we're going to make disciples of all the nations. The Reformers prioritized their nation. Look at the missionaries Calvin sent to France. Knox said 'Give me Scotland or I die.' Latimer and Ridley are lighting a candle for England as they are burning to death. We will focus on our nation but not to the exclusion of our nation to reach all the nations but we will do it by making disciples, equipping Christians to stay in ministry, worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ – on mission, on message and in ministry.

Once we let any need or even the culture itself become our mission, it will change our message. We have to stay on mission, on message and in ministry as the Word of God, our infallible, inerrant, authoritative Word and then watch what happens. I wish I could just keep telling you what God is doing. The first African American member of this congregation is 94 years old now and I look at this burgeoning ministry of Grace Home. Why is it burgeoning? It is because she was evangelized and disciplined and that is what she is doing through that Grace Home – evangelizing and discipling turning out worshippers and witnesses for Jesus Christ. That is what God has called us to do.

So here I stand. I can do no other. He has given me the message, the mission and the ministry. And I'm grateful He has given me a life to give to it. So again in the words of Martin

Luther, 'Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me.' Here we stand. We can do no other. God help us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, even as You change everything around because of what You did in Your church through a Reformation that affirmed the place of the Scripture to define our mission, our message and our ministry, would You do that again? You turned the world upside down with it in the first century. You changed everything in the 16th century. We need it again but we don't let the need define our message, mission and ministry for it is Your Word that is infallible, inerrant, and sufficient and our final authority for what we believe, speak and do. So help us to stay on mission, making disciples of all the nations. Help us to stay on message with the Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ that transforms our lives from the inside out and then through Your church in a culture from the bottom up. Help us to be in ministry with a great commitment not only to the Great Commission but to the Great Commandment that we love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbors as ourselves and we that bring the message of God's love in Christ that we might praise Your Name, evangelize the lost, grow them in grace and send Your people into the world – on message, on mission, in ministry, Amen.

Power Point

THE SOLA OF THE SOLAS

Sola Scriptura

The Scripture Alone is our only and final rule of faith and practice.

The Crucial Blessing of the Reformation

Life Takeaway

To know our Mission, Message and Ministry and...

To embrace our Mission, Message and Ministry and...

To stay on Mission, Message and Ministry...

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Here I Stand... I Can Do No Other... God Help Me!