

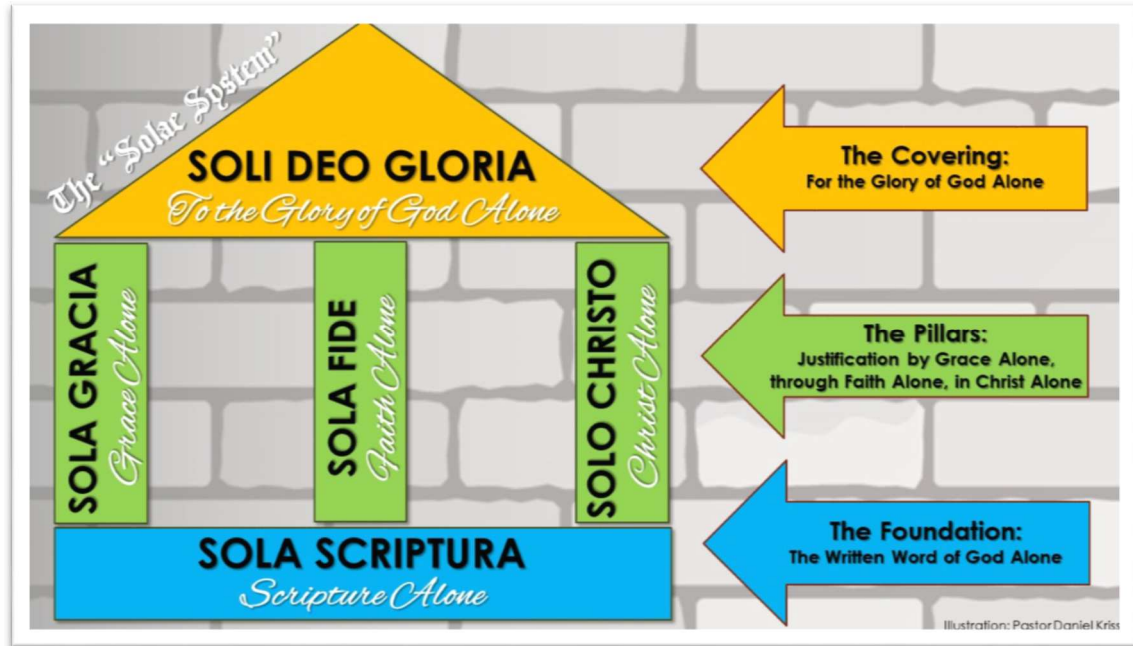
Reformation Month

Soli Deo Gloria

Various Texts

Introduction

Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation.



We have arrived at the final installment of our Reformation Month. What a rich time of teaching and fellowship we have experienced around these 5 Solas. I hope by now that you have an appreciation for the men and women of the 16th and 17th century who opposed the religion of the day, and ushered in the protestant reformation.

This morning I preach a message entitled: **Soli Deo Gloria – to the glory of God alone: The Chief Aim of the Reformation**

1. Defining the Glory of God

In seeking to define the "glory of God", we face two major problems. The first is that we are finite humans who cannot comprehend God. Secondly, even it were possible to understand the full measure of God's glory, we would be hindered by human language that could never do Him justice.

In other words, we are hindered in defining God and His glory by our own lack of understanding, and by our inadequate expression.

It was John Wesley who said, "Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God."

Despite our inability to comprehend the full weight of God's glory, I will endeavor to provide you with a number of definitions that I hope will help in our journey today.

When we speak of the “glory of God” we are referring to the “infinite worth of God made manifest.”¹

One commentator defined God's glory as “the beauty of His Spirit.”² He continued, “It is not an aesthetic beauty or a material beauty, but it is the beauty that emanates from His character, from all that He is.”³

John Piper says, “we may define God's glory as the beauty and greatness of His manifold perfections”.⁴

The late Jerry Bridges wrote, “The glory of God is the sum of all His infinite excellence and praiseworthiness set forth in display. To glorify God is first of all to respond properly to this display by ascribing to Him the honour and adoration due Him because of His excellence. We call this worship.”

To glorify God is to honour Him for who He really is. It is to give the right opinion of Him.

In referring to God's glory we need to understand that there are two aspects to this discussion:

1. God's Absolute Glory
2. God's Attributed Glory

1. God's Absolute Glory refers to His infinite worth despite any acknowledgement on the part of His creation. In other words, God is glorious, spectacular, beautiful, holy, majestic, radiant, and of supreme value, and this objective truth requires no validation by anyone other than God-Himself.

Jonathan Edwards wrote, “It is evident, by both Scripture and reason, that God is infinitely, eternally, unchangeably, and independently glorious and happy: that He cannot be profited by, or receive any thing from, the creature.”

Thomas Watson (1620-1686), a late reformer, puritan, and preacher described God's absolute glory this way, “God has no need of our services; He is infinitely blessed in reflecting upon the splendour of His own infinite being: we cannot add the least cubit to His essential [absolute] glory”.

If God's absolute glory entered this place we would all die.

READING: Exodus 33:17-23

2. God's Attributed Glory refers to His calling upon all creation to adore, venerate, worship, honour, exalt, esteem, and reverence Him. This is the privilege and chief aim of man – to attribute the glory that is due to God.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism was written in 1646 and 1647. A Catechism is a “doctrinal manual” often written in the form of questions and answers. The Westminster Shorter Catechism was written to educate children and others of “weaker capacity” in the reformed faith. This catechism contains 107 questions and answers that every Christian should read and know. The very first question and answer is of particular concern in our study today:

¹ See: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/soli-deo-gloria/>

² See: <https://www.gotquestions.org/glory-of-God.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ See: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/soli-deo-gloria/>

Q.1 What is the chief end of man?

A.1 Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.

All of creation is called to give God glory. It is both the supreme privilege and responsibility of every person.

READINGS: Psalm 29:1-2; Psalm 96;

In a crescendo of praise, Paul writes, *"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."*⁵

The Glory of God and the Reformers

Although the 5 solas were not an organized paradigm as we see them today, the reformers believed every truth contained within this powerful illustration.

Each of the four preceding "solas" protect the glory of God against all forms of human conceit.

Sola Scriptura protects the glory of God in that it exalts His Word over all forms of ecclesiastical tradition and ceremonialism.

Sola Gratia protects the glory of God in that it exalts His work of salvation as a free gift, and opposes man's efforts in every way.

Sola Fide protects the glory of God in that it declares a man to be justified by faith alone, apart from all works and deeds of the flesh.

Solo Christo protects the glory of God in that it declares that Christ alone is the means of salvation, and that no pope or priest can procure salvation for another.

For the reformers, theology was not a cold, intellectual exercise, but rather the gateway to greater measures of God's glory.

They would say, "If you want to know God, and glorify Him in greater measures, you must know Him through revelation, and that revelation is the doctrine of the Scriptures."

Application:

Christianity today has largely lost sight of its purpose. It is rare to find a Christian who is truly concerned with the glory of God.

Understanding God's infinite worth WILL result in our worship and praise.

Most of us do not want to see God's glory, for it would strip us of all worldly pursuits which we love so dearly.

The apostles, the church fathers, the reformers, and the puritans had an insatiable desire for God's glory. Their lives were spent in its pursuit.

Today we are so distracted. We are so concerned and consumed with temporal things. Would to God that we, like Moses would say, *"Show me your glory."*

For the remainder of this message, I would like to do a short synopsis of the Glory of God as seen in the pages of Scripture.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:17

2. The Glory of God Existed before Creation

We have already discussed the fact that God's absolute (or essential) glory requires no validation by anyone other than Himself. However, I would also like to point out that God's Absolute Glory existed before creation.

READING: John 17:5;

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit existed in perfect union, harmony and glory long before the world began.

This reality puts to rest the self-centered notion that God somehow needed us in order that He might be glorified.

God's glory is not dependent upon you and I. He was glorified before our birth and He will be glorified for all eternity.

Many Christians today operate as though their presence fulfills some great hole in the character of God without which He would be lonely and would crave our attention. God did not have some "man-sized gap" in His life that He desperately needed to fill. This theology is absurd, and full of pride!

3. The Glory of God Expressed in Creation

God's power, creativity, magnificence and sovereignty is seen in all that He created. Even though nature and creation groans now under the weight of sin (Romans 8:22-23), we still see the fingerprints of God's divine power in all that He created.

READINGS: Psalm 19:1-6; Job 12:7-10; Psalm 8; Romans 1:19-23;

Creation is God's general revelation to all of mankind. It is glorious, but it is also overlooked and unappreciated.

John Piper explains it best.

If you don't see the greatness of God then all the things that money can buy become very exciting. If you can't see the sun you will be impressed with a street light. If you've never felt thunder and lightning you'll be impressed with fireworks. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God you'll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures.

What shall be our response to the glory of God expressed in creation?

Steve DeWitt's Book, *Eyes Wide Open: Enjoying God in Everything*, says:

"Creation speaks to us — every day, all the time, constantly shouting truths about spiritual reality. Did you hear it this morning as you got up? Did you feel any truth about God this morning as you took a hot shower? Did you taste any truth as you delighted in your morning coffee? Did you hear any divine reality as you heard a bird singing? Did you see any truth as you saw the blue of the sky? What have you actually felt, tasted, touched, seen, and heard today? The whole earth is filled with His glory. Every day creation shouts to us, God is glorious! God is creator! God is provider! God is love! God is there! . . . Everywhere I look, everything I feel, hear, smell, and taste transmits the beauty of God through the beauty of creation. He is the beauty behind all beauty."

4. The Glory of God Expressed in Redemption

This fourth point was the primary concern of the protestant reformers. The gospel had been so veiled and so altered by the religion of the day, that God's glory in His redemptive plan of salvation was almost entirely obscured.

God's glory, power, majesty, sovereignty, kindness, love, grace, mercy and truth is most clearly seen in His work of salvation.

If you would know God, and if you would attribute the glory due to His name, you must see Him as revealed in the message of redemption.

Creation will bring us to a place of wonder, the cross will bring us to a place of worship. Wonder is wonderful but worship is worth-ship. God delights not in our wonder, but our worship. He does not simply want us to be in awe, but to adore. To perceive is pleasant but to praise is purposeful.

Let us look for a few moments at the Glory of God in Redemption as revealed in Scripture:

READINGS: Ephesians 1:3-14; Philippians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:14

The jewel of God's glory is the gospel. The highest aim of God's salvation was not our rescue, but His glory. There is nothing spectacular about the Christian save only the Christ who abides within.

Again, we have the tendency to make salvation about us. It is not about us. It is about God.

G. Campbell Morgan writes: *"The deepest passion of the heart of Jesus was not the saving of men, but the glory of God; and then the saving of men, because that is for the glory of God."*

God's redemptive plan of salvation is the greatest expression of His glory. We must not cheapen, undervalue, or misappropriate the gospel of God, for to do so is to rob Him of the praise that is due to His name.

In reflecting on the glory of the gospel and the work of Christ in salvation, the great reformer, Martin Luther writes: *"We need to hear the Gospel every day, because we forget it every day."*

5. The Glory of God is the Message of the Redeemed

The glory of God is to be the life-song of every Christian.

Since God's glory is most evidently seen in the message of the gospel, this must be in our minds and on our lips constantly.

READINGS: Psalm 96:1-3; Psalm 107:1-3,20-22

The primary occupation of every Christian is the proclamation of God's glory among the nations.

6. The Glory of God is the Theme of Eternity

This final point takes us beyond this life into the next.

Heaven is simply the unrestrained realization of God's glory. No longer will Moses be hidden in the cleft of the rock, perceiving only the back of God. There He shall see, as will we, the full, awesome, majestic, unveiled glory of God.

No longer shall sin distract us. The rotting flesh that once prohibited our full and faithful worship will be stripped from us, and we shall see Him as He is.

The Devil and His army of darkness will reign no more, for the King of Glory is seated on the throne.

All forms of evil and wickedness will be confined to hell, and all that remains is the glory of God.

READINGS: Revelation 4; Revelation 5:8-14

The theme of eternity for the Christian is the glory of God.

Horatius Bonar lived from 1808-1889. He was a tremendous poet. Listen to His description of the life to come as we close.

Heaven at Last

by Horatius Bonar

Angel-voices sweetly
singing,
Echoes through the
blue dome ringing,
News of wondrous
gladness bringing;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

What a city! what a
glory!
Far beyond the
brightest story
Of the ages old and
hoary;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Not a tear-drop ever
falleth,
Not a pleasure ever
palleth,
Song to song for ever
calleth;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Now, beneath us all
the grieving,
All the wounded spirit's
heaving,
All the woe of hopes
deceiving;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Softest voices, silver-
pealing,
Freshest fragrance,
spirit-healing,
Happy hymns around
us stealing;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Christ himself the living
splendour,
Christ the sunlight mild
and tender;
Praises to the Lamb we
render;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Sin for ever left behind
us,
Earthly visions cease to
blind us,
Fleshly fetters cease to
bind us;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Gone the vanity and
folly,
Gone the dark and
melancholy,
Come the joyous and
the holy;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Now at length the veil
is rended,
Now the pilgrimage is
ended,
And the saints their
thrones ascended;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

On the jasper threshold
standing,
Like a pilgrim safely
landing,
See, the strange bright
scene expanding
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Not a broken blossom
yonder,
Not a link can snap
asunder,
Stay'd the tempest,
sheathed the thunder;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

Broken death's dread
bands that bound us,
Life and victory around
us;
Christ, the King, himself
hath crown'd us;
Ah, 'tis heaven at last!

We conclude this series on the 5 solas of the Reformation with a verse that was precious to every one of them:

NOT TO US, O LORD, NOT TO US, BUT TO YOUR NAME GIVE GLORY - PSALM 115:1

Soli Deo Gloria – To the Glory of God Alone!