

In 1384, John Wycliffe, the morning star of the reformation, died of a stroke in Lutterworth, England. His life, until its end, was the beginning of a recovery of the Scriptures and the Gospel from the corrupt and power hungry Church of Rome.

Wycliffe broke with tradition by refusing to claim that the Church was the final authority in matters of faith. In 1378 he authored *The Truth of Holy Scripture* in which he claimed that the Bible alone was the authority for believers. He stated that church councils, tradition, and even the Pope himself were to be held accountable to the authority and teaching of Scripture.

He also proclaimed that every Christian should be able to read the Bible for himself! This was novel, for the church not only controlled and interpreted the Bible for its members, but only the clergy were even allowed to own or read Bibles! Wycliffe's answer was to publish the Bible in the everyday language of the people.

Wycliffe went on to say that the office of Pope was an invention of men and not based on Scripture. He said that the Pope was indeed the antichrist, exalting himself in the place of Christ the Lord. Further, he stood up against the doctrine of transubstantiation – the idea that at the offering of the mass, the Eucharist, that the priest offered Jesus again as a sacrifice for God's people and that the people then ate bread and wine which was literally the physical body and blood of Jesus.

As Wycliffe continued in the teachings and tradition of Augustine his greatest contribution to the world was the Bible translated into everyday language.

John Hus carried on the teachings of Wycliffe after his death. Hus, from Bohemia, not only encouraged the translation of the Word of God into the language of the people, but he preached in the language of the people instead of in Latin. He wanted the gospel to be heard and believed by those to whom he preached.

Hus also rejected the power and authority of the Pope, and while at a meeting to discuss his views in 1415 was arrested and burnt at the stake for his "heresy." The council also took the opportunity to proclaim Wycliffe a heretic, even though he had been dead for almost 40 years. In fact, they dug up his bones and burnt them in contempt for his teaching and its influence on Hus.

At the end of Hus' trial, when asked if he would appeal to the Pope for mercy, he responded,

I do affirm before you all, that there is no more just or effectual appeal, than that which is made unto Christ. Who is a higher judge than Christ?

When the chain was wrapped around his neck, binding him to the stake, he cried out,

My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this for my sake, and why then should I be ashamed of this rusty one?

As Hus was dying, being burned alive at the stake, he proclaimed,

What I have taught with my lips I seal with my blood. You are now going to burn a goose, but in a century you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil.

The name Hus, means literally “goose.” In the 100 years from 1415 to the early 1500s another man came on the scene, a man whose family crest was the picture of a swan. That man was Martin Luther.

In the years between Hus and Luther there arose another figure of great importance, William Tyndale. He learned Greek so that he might translate the Word of God in the New Testament from the original language into English. You and I have our Bibles today because of the perseverance and hard work of William Tyndale. His English New Testament is certainly one of the most important books ever published in the English language.

Tyndale, while in attendance at a meeting with priests and bishops said that he “defied the Pope and all his laws” and vowed that “a plough-boy would know more of the Scriptures than they.” He was condemned as a blasphemer and heretic and burnt at the stake.

As the Word of God spread, and God continued moving upon men to proclaim the truth of the gospel, on the Eve of All Saints Day, October 31, 1517, (Reformation Day) exactly 488 years ago this week, a momentous and incredible event took place at the Church in Wittenberg, Germany, in fulfillment of Hus earlier prophecy. There this Roman Catholic monk named Martin Luther, the swan, challenged the leaders of the church that had burned the goose to a debate. He did so in the form of a protest.

Luther had long been studying the Scriptures and having been regenerated by the Spirit of God was given understanding as to what the Scriptures taught about sin, salvation, and especially about the justification of lost sinners by faith alone in Jesus Christ. He came to see, as had Wycliffe and Hus, that the sole authority for the church was the Word of God.

Describing his own conversion, Luther wrote:

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In this the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives, by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

As Luther reacted against and protested the selling of indulgences (money paid to the church for the forgiveness of sins) and many other abuses by the church – things that he saw the church doing that clearly contradicted the teachings of Holy Scripture – he made a list. His list of 95 offenses or abuses, which are referred to as Luther's 95 Theses was an indictment of the church and many of its tradition and practices.

In challenging the church, he wanted a public debate, and so took and nailed his list to the church door at Wittenberg. He made a public protest by posting this in such a way. It was a public statement about the condition of the church and its relation to the truth of Holy Scripture.

In response he was put on trial and challenged to recant of his theses, which the church court saw as heresy. He challenged their ultimate and infallible authority to interpret the Word of God for the people. At this trial, known as the Diet of Worms, Luther stood his ground. In fact, his final reply to the command to recant was an absolute appeal to the authority of Scripture alone as his guide in matters of faith. Luther was asked by the court:

Do you wish to defend the books which are recognized as your work? Or to recant anything contained in them? . . .He concluded his reply by saying: You demand a simple answer. Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by plain reason (for I do not accept the authority of popes or councils, for they have often contradicted each other), my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.. God help me. Amen. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.

As history unfolded around him, this date and time at that church door have become the spark that brought FIRES of renewal to the church and freed to gospel from the clutches of the cultic church controlled by Rome and the Pope. This spark, this birth of a protest against the abuses of the Church, is known to us today as the Protestant Reformation.

This turning point in history has given us many rich traditions and doctrines. The foundation of the Reformation of course is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This truth sprung forth from the cornerstone, the conviction that God's Word, the Holy Scriptures, was itself the sole infallible authority for life and faith, for salvation and Christian living, for the church and the world.

Reformed Theology has been defined by the great Presbyterian pastor James Boice as "theology solidly based on the Bible itself." He goes on to say:

Reformed Christians hold to the doctrines characteristic of all Christians, including the Trinity, the true deity and true humanity of Jesus Christ, the necessity of Jesus' atonement for sin, the church as a divinely ordained institution, the inspiration of the Bible. The requirement that Christians live moral lives, and the resurrection of the body. They hold other doctrines in common with evangelical Christians, such as justification by faith alone,

the need for the new birth, the personal and visible return of Jesus Christ, and the Great Commission.

But the specifics, the signature beliefs of those who are reformed in their theology, he defined as the commitment to the doctrine of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, the Doctrines of Grace, and the cultural mandate to work to bring people to Jesus Christ the Lord.

Many others have rightly summarized the great truths and foundation of the reformation as the Five Solas. Sola, the Latin word for alone, is a distinctive term in Reformed Theology.

Our ministry, in the reformed tradition, agrees with James Boice and readily identifies our belief in the doctrines of grace and the five solas of the reformation. So let us take a look now throughout the coming week at these Five Solas. What are the Five Solas? Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria. How do we relate to them today? How are we actively carrying on in the spirit of the reformation? Answering these questions will tell us where the reformation is today.

Sola Scriptura – Scripture Alone

As we have seen illustrated by these great men (Wycliffe, Hus, Tyndale, and Luther), we agree that the Scriptures are the sole, the only, infallible authority for matters of faith and practice. We, along with those who are historically reformed and baptistic, find at the very beginning of our confession of faith the following statement regarding the Word of God:

Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689 – The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God so much that man is left without any excuse, they are not sufficient to provide that knowledge of God and His will which is necessary for salvation.

And we agree with the following statements that help us define the doctrine of Sola Scriptura:

Charles Spurgeon (from a Treasury of David, commentary on Psalm 19:7)

The law of the Lord is perfect;” by which he means not merely the law of Moses but the doctrine of God, the whole run and rule of sacred Writ. The doctrine revealed by God he declares to be perfect, and yet David had but a very small part of the Scriptures, and if a fragment, and that the darkest and most historical portion, be perfect, what must the entire volume be? How more than perfect is the book which contains the clearest possible display of divine love, and gives us an open vision of redeeming grace. The gospel is a complete

scheme or law of gracious salvation, presenting to the needy sinner everything that his terrible necessities can possibly demand. There are no redundancies and no omissions in the Word of God, and in the plan of grace; why then do men try to paint this lily and gild this refined gold? The gospel is perfect in all its parts, and perfect as a whole: it is a crime to add to it, treason to alter it, and felony to take from it.

The Cambridge Declaration: A Statement from the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith.

In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word “evangelical.” In the past it served as a bond of unity between Christians from a wide diversity of church traditions. Historic evangelicalism was confessional. It embraced the essential truths of Christianity as those were defined by the great ecumenical councils of the church. In addition, evangelicals also shared a common heritage in the “solas” of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word “evangelical” has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, his gospel and his church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible.

Sola Scriptura: The Erosion of Authority. Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church’s life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church’s understanding, nurture and discipline.

Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, cliches, promises and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preacher's opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given.

The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

Sola Fide – Faith Alone

In proclaiming the truth that salvation is by grace alone we understand from the same text, Eph 2:8-9, that God gives with His grace the faith we need in order to believe Him and obey the gospel. Our justification is solely by faith. It is not faith that is alone (faith without works), but by active, living faith alone (faith that works). It is not by the works that faith accomplishes. It is by the instrumentality of that gift, by faith alone, that we are made righteous before God.

The Puritan Catechism

32. Q. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in his sight (2 Cor. 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom. 5:19), and received by faith alone (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9).

Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689 – Justification

1. Those whom God effectually calls He also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting them as righteous, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone. They are not justified because God reckons as their righteousness either their faith, their believing, or any other act of evangelical obedience. They are justified wholly and solely because God

imputes to them Christ's righteousness. He imputes to them Christ's active obedience to the whole law and His passive obedience in death. They receive Christ's righteousness by faith, and rest on Him. They do not possess or produce this faith themselves, it is the gift of God.

2. Faith which receives Christ's righteousness and depends on Him is the sole instrument of justification, yet this faith is not alone in the person justified, but is always accompanied by all the other saving graces. And it is not a dead faith, but works by love.

3. Christ, by His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified, and by the sacrifice of himself through the blood of His cross, underwent instead of them the penalty due to them, so making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on their behalf. Yet because He was given by the Father for them, and because His obedience and satisfaction was accepted instead of theirs (and both freely, not because of anything in them), therefore they are justified entirely and solely by free grace, so that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

4. From all eternity God decreed to justify all the elect, and Christ, in the fullness of time, died for their sins, and rose again for their justification. Nevertheless, they are not personally justified until the Holy Spirit, in due time, actually applies Christ to them.

5. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may because of their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure. In that condition they will not usually have the light of God's countenance restored to them until they humble themselves, confess their sins, ask for pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

6. The justification of believers during the Old Testament period was in all these respects exactly the same as the justification of New Testament believers.

Martin Luther

Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God (cf. John 1). It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. What a living, creative, active powerful thing is faith! It is impossible that faith ever stop doing good. Faith doesn't ask whether good works are to be done, but, before it is asked, it has done them. It is always active. Whoever doesn't do such works is without faith; he gropes and searches about him for faith and good works but doesn't know what faith or good works are. Even so, he chatters on with a great many words about faith and good works.

Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith. Through faith, a person will do

good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace. It is as impossible to separate works from faith as burning and shining from fire. Therefore be on guard against your own false ideas and against the chatteringers who think they are clever enough to make judgments about faith and good works but who are in reality the biggest fools. Ask God to work faith in you; otherwise you will remain eternally without faith, no matter what you try to do or fabricate.

In Romans chapter 5, St. Paul comes to the fruits and works of faith, namely: joy, peace, love for God and for all people; in addition: assurance, steadfastness, confidence, courage, and hope in sorrow and suffering. All of these follow where faith is genuine, because of the overflowing good will that God has shown in Christ: he had him die for us before we could ask him for it, yes, even while we were still his enemies. Thus we have established that faith, without any good works, makes just.

The Cambridge Declaration

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical. Although fallen human nature has always recoiled from recognizing its need for Christ's imputed righteousness, modernity greatly fuels the fires of this discontent with the biblical Gospel. We have allowed this discontent to dictate the nature of our ministry and what it is we are preaching.

Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations.

While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to him our sin and imputed to us his righteousness. Because he bore our judgment, we now walk in his grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and adopted as God's children. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach him.

We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice.

We deny that justification rests on any merit to be found in us, or upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, or that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognized as a legitimate church.

For the complete transcript and related sermons follow this link:

<https://timeintheword.org/2019/10/27/reformation-day-readings-and-sermons/>