

Soli Deo Gloria
(Psalm 66:5-20, 1Timothy 1:12-17)
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Today we continue our series on the “five solas” of the Reformation. Have you been working on your own top five most important aspects of faith?

I encourage you all to do so...and then-as a Lenten discipline-test your ideas with scripture, are your ideas supported by the Bible? If so reflect upon them during this season of preparation.

Last week we discussed the importance of holding up scripture as our ultimate authority, this week we will discuss why it is important to give God ALONE the glory in all we do, even in the most mundane tasks.

Soli Deo Gloria is probably the most well known of the five solas. There are 372,000 hits on this in the Google search engine! It is used often; just this past week Mark Lovett-the Lutheran pastor in Holyrood-used it to conclude his pastor’s podium article.

The Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the initials "SDG" to the musical manuscripts of each of his cantatas and many of his other works. This divine dedication was also used by George Frederic Handel-most famous for the creation of the Oratorio “The Messiah.”

To God alone (be) the Glory, or glory to God alone, is the motto of many Universities and also the American Guild of Organists.

The reason for its creation comes out of a time in which the then established Christian Church-The R.C.C.-was giving many “others” too much glory.

The Reformers took on the Roman Catholic Church with regard to its glorification of idols and images. This is still a difference between protestant and Catholic churches, the more ornate the worship space the more likely it is Roman Catholic.

The Reformers also opposed the glorification of the Pope and or other church officers.
When any church’s leaders become “above the law” such a church is doomed to experience failure or dysfunction regardless of the denomination.

Another dispute was the glorification of Mary, in many ways she was elevated to parallel or even higher regard than Christ.

I can remember my father telling me as a boy that, “In many ways we Presbyterians probably talk too little about Mary but the Catholics certainly talk about her too much.”

This issue continues to divide Protestants and Catholics. Is the virgin mother of the Son of God important? YES-without hesitation! But in our beliefs, no one other than God is to receive our prayers.

Soli Deo Gloria-to GOD ALONE be the glory become the overarching principle of the Reformation and it can be related to every theological battle in which they engaged.

Further, over the centuries, and especially in our modern context, we are very accustomed to the word “glory” but if you were to ask any number of Christians to define it you would get probably three times as many definitions.

When you hear the word “glory”, what do you think of?

When we consider the glory of God, we use it as both a noun and a verb. The noun is similar to honor but is the outward manifestation of all of the attributes of God.

As His goodness or power or righteousness is displayed in the world, God’s glory is revealed. Although we were made by Him in His image, we are infinitely not Him.

The second part of glory is the verb to glorify. This is the declaration of high praise, honor or worship to God. It is an acknowledgement of who God is and who we are. All that God does manifests His honor to the universe.

-“We will glorify the King of Kings, Lord of Lords etc.”

The Scriptures clearly declare that God is a jealous God requiring that no thing or no one else should be worshipped in His place.

Whether we substitute the church, certain styles or instruments of worship, the design of a church building, the personality of the pastor, the size of the membership, the color of the carpet or even ourselves, any substitution of the ascribing of greatness and declaring it glorious is idolatry; worshipping something else as god.

What things matter most/least to you about a church?

In what ways do these things matter? Do they bring glory to God why/why not?

There are many ways that the Scriptures tell us to glorify God:

“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!” Psalm 66:1-2

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” 1TIM 1:17

All of the nations will glorify Him; Psalm 86:9-10.

We are to glorify Him through belief as did Abraham; Romans 4:19-22.

We are to glorify God with our bodies whether single or married; 1 Corinthians 6:20.

We are to clothe ourselves with good works so that when the ungodly bring false accusations against us, God will be glorified; 1 Peter 2:12.

Because God has predestined us to salvation by grace through faith in Christ, God becomes glorified; Ephesians 1:11-12.

As has been said, one of the central issues during the Reformation was the improper exultation of the officers in the Church.

Even during the third century, there began to develop the mindset that the highest form of worship toward God could only be offered by those in full time ministry. The service of God then was the only true "calling" and all other vocations were inferior. This is not to say that early Christians believed work to be unimportant; rather they believed that ordinary working was necessary, but not glorifying to God.

By the time of the Reformation, the Reformers saw this faulty principle fully blossom into the self aggrandizing worship of the saints and officers in the church. Thus, the need to pray for or to the saints was seen as a way for non-clergy to experience "real glory."

Luther said, "The invocation of the saints is in conflict with and undermines the work of Christ...Although angels in heaven pray for us (as Christ himself also does) and although saints on earth, and perhaps also in heaven, do likewise, it does not follow that we should invoke angels and saints, pray to them, keep fasts and festivals for them, say masses and offer sacrifices to them, establish churches altars, and services for them...this is idolatry." (The Reformation Reader, Janz p.125)

Thus in the defense of every member mattering along came the idea of "The Protestant Work Ethic"

At the heart of this debate are the words "calling" and "talent".

I speak of receiving a call to First Presbyterian Church of Ellsworth, but is that just "pastor talk" for finding a job?

The Reformers used the term calling to be any vocation for which God had equipped someone to perform.

They believed that whatever work God had given us to do, if done faithfully would be equally glorifying of Him as other faithful work.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul teaches that whatever it is that we do whether mundane or extraordinary, all should be done by faith to the glory of God.

In what ways do you feel called to your line of work or life's duties?

The Reformers made no distinction between the spiritual or temporal; sacred or secular. They believed that God had created us to be workers or producers and that whether you were in the pulpit, field, classroom or kitchen; all that we do-when done by faith-would bring glory to God. Isaiah 60:21.

However, one must be very careful in application of this mindset so as to not allow another idol to emerge: the worshipping of the work itself.

If/when working itself becomes more important than the glory of God, then one is no longer following a "Protestant work Ethic"; instead it has become a Pagan work-ethic.

You all know what I am talking about. There is a fine-line between being a hard worker and becoming enslaved to your job. God desires that you put your full energies into your own unique and distinct callings however one's faith, family and friends-in that order-need not be forgotten in the process of striving for the "Almighty dollar".

In what ways do you communicate glory to God in your job/or life's calling?

How does glorifying God impact the way you spend your time?

To give God alone the glory takes an intentional direction of your mind, body and spirit.

The Reformers made it clear that whenever we allow the wrong kinds of worship and glorification, troubles quickly follow!

The best way to test your faith and life's perspective-regardless of denomination-is to give it a humility and gratefulness test.

How humbly do you approach all that you are given to do?

How grateful are you for your family, best friends or the Savior that died upon the cross for your sins?!

If-even in the complexities/tragedies of life-you awaken each day ready to give God the, splendor, praise, honor and service in a small or significant way then you are on the right path.

Are you on the right path? If not, what or whom is getting in the way?!

To God Alone be the glory, AMEN!