

*Like many ministries, TOTT is feeling the impact of these tough economic times. We would like to ask our readers for their prayer support in meeting these needs so that this ministry can continue.*

successors in the priesthood to offer” Jesus’ “body and blood under the species of bread and wine” (Session 22, Chapter 1), while Scripture, of course, says no such thing.

Catastrophically, all this today is progressively being reversed. In spite of the overwhelming proof of Rome’s blasphemies, many professing evangelicals not only want to *embrace* Rome but even *return* to it.

Another particularly crucial development in our day is “inclusivism,” which teaches that although salvation comes through Jesus, it is not necessary to possess specific knowledge concerning Jesus as Savior. Other religions, in fact, can be vehicles of salvation for people who never heard of Jesus Christ, but “finally” (ultimately) are included because of their sincerity and positive response to general revelation. By their own admission, modern inclusivists include Robert Schuller, Billy Graham, C. S. Lewis, F. F. Bruce, Neal Punt, Clark Pinnock, and others.

Oh, that this would be a new call to each of us to understand like never before that it’s all about Christ *alone*. If we abandon that, we have given up the ship.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria, Our Only Motive***

In the final “sola” of the Reformation, we discover that our only *motive* in all we have seen is to bring God, and God *alone*, glory. All our theology, all our preaching, all our teaching, all that we do and say, is to bring glory to God alone. Ephesians 1:6 declares: **To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.**

In the days prior to the Reformation, it was only popes, priests, cardinals, monks, and nuns who were considered to be those who honored God. The Reformation shattered that illusion and called such spiritual elitism the lie that it is. The Reformers, for example, cherished marriage and child rearing, which flew in the face of the supposed superiority of celibacy. The people were taught, in fact, that *everything* they did could glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17).

The effects of such revolutionary teaching on society were astounding. *Art* was transformed from merely pictures of saints to ones that celebrated creation and ordinary life, using people, landscapes, flowers, birds, and people at work and play. *Music* was also transformed. Latin hymnody was devoid of truth, filled with Mariolatry as well as many praises written to the martyrs. The Reformation brought back congregational singing, which had vanished for 1,000 years, and replaced the cold, hollow chanting of priests. Because of the Reformation, for example, we have the music of Bach and Mendelssohn. The words *Soli Deo Gloria*, in fact, were carved into the organ at Bach’s church in Leipzig, and Mendelssohn penned his *Reformation Symphony* (Symphony No. 5 in D Major) in 1832 in honor of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther’s Augsburg Confession. Even the study of *science* was a product of the Reformation. Because Roman Catholicism was based more on Aristotle’s dualistic view of the universe instead of Scripture, it

stifled scientific discovery. The reformers, however, taught that God has written two books, the book of Nature and the book of the Word and that these two complement the other and are never contradictory.

But once again, our day has spawned new attacks: secularism, humanism, pragmatism, relativism, mysticism, materialism, seeker-sensitivity, Open Theism, postmodernism, Emergence, inclusivism, rationalistic textual (lower) criticism, historical (higher) criticism, and more. In short, *Truth has simply vanished*. As a magician performs slight of hand by keeping your attention on one hand while his other does something else, that is what has happened today. While one hand has been mesmerizing the crowds with all kinds of eye-pleasing, flesh-feeding feats, Truth has been discarded. And why has the Truth vanished? Because, and please get this, *the Reformation has been abandoned*. When that happened, we again gave up the ship.

What, then, was the Reformers’ point in *Soli Deo Gloria*? Was it man’s “felt-needs”? Was it entertainment? Was it man’s self-esteem? No! Their driving motive was God’s glory (1 Chron. 16:7–36; Rev. 5:12; etc.). The only way God alone *can* be glorified, the Reformers insisted, is through the other *solas*. To fail in any one of these, in fact, is to rob God of glory. God receives glory only when *Scripture alone* is our authority; popes, councils, and priests, are robbers. God receives glory only when *grace alone* is acknowledged; so-called free will and those who espouse such humanistic rubbish are robbers. God receives glory only when *faith alone* is established; works and human effort are robbers. God receives glory only when *Christ alone* is recognized; sacraments are robbers.

Oh, that the five *solas* of the Reformation would be burned into the hearts and minds of God’s people today! These are not just the tenets of the Reformation; they are the very pillars of Christianity itself. My dear Christian Friend, without them, we are doomed; not only is salvation impossible, but the church has no foundation. Let us embrace them, defend them, and proclaim them. Why? For only they give God *alone* glory.

Let us each ask ourselves this question: *Do I want to be a product of the Reformation, or a casualty of innovation?*

Dr. J. D. Watson  
Pastor-Teacher  
Grace Bible Church

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This two-part article is a condensation of a six-part message series. Pastor Watson is available to speak on this subject.
- <sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, ed. Ewald M. Plass, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 2:704 n.5.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 2:704.
- <sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Warnings to the Churches*, Banner of Truth, 1992, 158 (emphasis in the original).
- <sup>5</sup> E. Gordon Rupp, P. Watson, *Luther And Erasmus: Free Will And Salvation* (The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 47.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Bondage of the Will* (Fleming H. Revell, 1992), p. 319.

wrote to the Romans: **As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one** (Rom. 3.10–12). **Gone out of the way** translates a single word in the Greek, *ekklinō*. The root *klinō* is a verb that literally means “to bend something from a straight position,” and so metaphorically “to swerve or turn away.” The prefix *ek* basically means “out of or from,” so we could translate this: “to swerve from the path.” Man has swerved, turned away, from the path of God’s righteousness so radically, so completely, that he not only cannot get back on that path, but also has no desire to seek to do so even if he knew where it was.

It is precisely because of that condition that Scripture goes on to say that God gives man the faith to believe: **For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of your selves: it is the gift of God** (Eph. 2:8). As noted in TOTT #15, the clear and obvious antecedent for the pronoun “it” is faith. Faith *had* to be God’s gift, for without that gift, fallen man would *never* believe. Several other Scriptures strongly substantiate this principle (Jn. 1:12–13; 6:65; Phil. 1:29; Acts 18:27). The words **through grace** in Acts 18:27 are especially important. The Greek actually reads *dia tēs charitos*, “through the grace.” **Through** is *dia*, which in this construction indicates agency, means, or instrumentality. Added to this is the presence of the definite article “the” (*tēs*). How does one believe? Not by his own power, rather by the agency, means, and instrumentality of the grace of God.

In stark contrast, while Roman Catholicism speaks of grace, it means something *vastly different* from what Scripture says and what the Reformers defended. Again, in response to the reformers, the Council of Trent declared:

If anyone says that by the said sacraments of the New Law [a term that refers to the Trent’s canons and decrees on the seven sacraments] grace is not conferred through the act performed [*ex opere operato*, lit., “the work worked”] but [says] that faith alone in the divine promises is sufficient for the obtaining of grace, let him be anathema. (Session 7, canon 8)

In other words, grace is not *received* from God by *faith*, but is rather *infused* by man’s *works*, specifically, through his performing of the sacraments. The Catholic Church, therefore, maintains that the church is the dispensary of grace. It is through the church that grace emanates from Christ and is dispensed to the individual through the sacraments. Such apostasy and blasphemy is beyond imagination, but what is far worse is how many “evangelicals” are jettisoning the Reformation and embracing the Roman Church.

### ***Solus Christus, Our Only Mediator***

*Solus Christus*, Christ alone, plunged even deeper into

the Reformation debate, driving “a stake” through the very heart of Catholicism. The Mass, the re-crucifying of Christ, was the focal point of the entire system. The Mass, the Roman Church taught (and still teaches), is the *same sacrifice* as the sacrifice of the Cross. Through the act of *transubstantiation* (“a change of substance”) the priest supposedly performs a miracle just as real as those of Jesus. With the words, “We offer unto Thee, the living, the true, the eternal God,” the miracle is wrought and the people then partake of “The Body of Christ.”

So central was this to Romanism, that in response to the upheaval the Reformers would make in a few years, the Council of Trent would declare of the Mass in 1562:

If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that He is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue; let him be anathema. (Session 13, Canon 1)

The Reformers, however, rejected this perverted spectacle and utterly blasphemous re-crucifixion of Christ. It was (and still is) a blatant departure from Hebrews 9:25, 28, 10:10, 12, and 15, which declare Jesus Christ alone was the *once-for-all sacrifice and the only sufficient payment for our sin*. It was that *one and only* sacrifice on the cross that ushered Christ “into the holy place,” where He “obtained eternal redemption for us,” and in which He was the *only Mediator* of the New Testament.

Regardless of those clear statements of Scripture, however, the Council of Trent responded to the reformers’ accusation of blasphemy by stating: “If any one saith, that, by the sacrifice of the mass, a blasphemy is cast upon the most holy sacrifice of Christ consummated on the cross; or, that it is thereby derogated from; let him be anathema” (Session 22, canon 4).

Also at issue was the whole concept of the priesthood, that is, a priest as the mediator between God and the people. The Church of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century had no priests. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read that this is an office in the church. It was a position in Mosaic Judaism alone and was replaced by the finished work of Christ. Rome’s priesthood, in fact, more closely resembles paganism than it does the Old Testament priesthood. Hebrew 7:12 clearly declares, “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law,” and verse 17 says that Christ alone is our “priest for ever” (and verses 18–27 go on to settle the matter).

The whole idea, then, of the so-called “Christian priesthood” is a totally Roman Catholic invention and a blasphemous one at that. It maintains that Jesus Himself “constituted [the apostles as] priests of the New Testament; and by those words, Do this in commemoration of me [Lk. 22:19; I Cor. 11:24-25], He commanded them and their

That alone, in fact, *is* the Gospel, the good news, as declared in Galatians 2:16; 1:1:8-9; Romans 3:21-22, 30, and many other verses. Salvation comes not by *ceremony*, but by the *cross*. It is not by the *ritual* of the *Church*, but the *righteousness* of *Christ*. It is not by the *bondage* of the *Law* but by *blood* of the *Lamb*. It is not by our *continuous works* but by His *completed work*. In short, the righteousness of God is not *granted* by *works*, but is a *gift* of *faith*.

This doctrine is hated and repudiated by Catholicism because, as one great writer puts it, half of its errors stem from the rejection of *sola fide*. That wonderful champion of evangelicalism, J. C. Ryle (1816–1900), wrote this scathing summary:

. . . the absence [in Catholicism] of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ's work alone accounts for half the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. The beginning of half the unscriptural doctrines of Popery may be traced up to rejection of justification by faith. No Romish teacher, if he is faithful to his church, can say to the anxious sinner, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He cannot do it without additions and explanations, which completely destroy the good news. He dare not give the Gospel medicine without adding something which destroys its efficacy and neutralizes its power. Purgatory, penance, priestly absolution, the intercession of saints, the worship of the Virgin, and many other man-made services of Popery, all spring from this source. They are all rotten props to support weary consciences. But they are rendered necessary by [Rome's] denial of justification by faith.

Romanism in perfection is a gigantic system of church-worship, sacrament-worship, Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship, and priest-worship. . . . it is . . . a *huge organized idolatry*.<sup>4</sup>

Where are the men today who will stand up and tell the truth, as did Ryle?

Rome, therefore, fought the Reformation tooth and nail, its biggest guns coming out at the Council of Trent, which began in 1545 and continued for almost twenty years. High on Trent's hit list was *sola fide*. One of its "canons" (principle tenets), for example, which has remained unchanged through Vatican I and II, was: "If anyone says that *by faith alone* the sinner is justified, so as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema" (session 6, canon 9). Trent went on to declare that the *instrumental* cause of justification (i.e., the means by which it is obtained) is not faith, but "the sacrament of baptism" (session 6, chapter 7) and that justification is forfeited whenever the believer commits a mortal sin (session 6, chapter 15). This without question makes justification dependent on human works in the Roman system. But such religion is *precisely* what Paul referred to in Galatians 1:8–9, where he declares that any other Gospel than that of faith alone is itself cursed of God.

Is this issue really all that important? Is it worth fighting for? Most certainly! To deny *sola fide* is to deny the finished work of Christ. To deny *sola fide* is to align ourselves with a pagan system that repudiates the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. To deny *sola fide* is to return to Rome!

### ***Sola Gratia, Our Only Method***

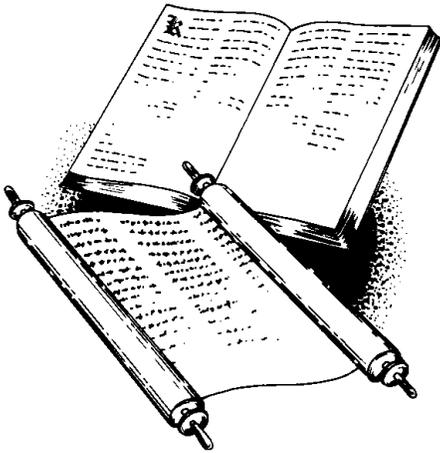
Here we arrive at the very core of the Doctrines of Grace. This term simply means that *saving* grace is *sovereign* grace, that salvation, from beginning to end, and everything in between, is by God's sovereign grace, apart from any contribution from man whatsoever. Salvation is either *all* of grace or *none* of it is of grace. Adding anything to grace, negates grace.

In a sense, it is this point that is the crux of the whole Reformation debate, perhaps, in fact, the key to the whole issue. In one of the most pivotal moments in the entire history of Theology, Dutch humanist and theologian Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) argued, "By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them."<sup>5</sup> In other words, man has voluntary or free power in and of himself to choose the way which leads to salvation apart from the grace of God (the same basic heresy Pelagius taught 1,000 years earlier, which we will examine in next month's follow-up article).

In short, in Erasmus' mind, God and man work together to bring man's salvation. It is not a work accomplished totally by God by His grace. In his response to Erasmus, Luther actually *commended* Erasmus for recognizing the real core issue separating Rome and Bible believers.<sup>6</sup> The issue of "free will" to Luther was the crux of the whole matter, namely, whether Christianity is a religion of *pure* grace or *partial* grace, that is, either *all* of God or *partly* of God with man. Would God simply supply the grace and man in his own power (his unfallen "free will") supply the faith, or must God supply it all?

*Sola gratia*, then, declares that God supplies not only *forgiveness* and *justification* by grace, but even *faith* by grace. That is why Christ is called "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), for He is the beginning and the ending of it. He has done it all. In fact, the doctrine of *sola fide* cannot be understood in its fullest apart from *sola gratia*. What is the source of faith? Is it the God-given means to salvation or is it a condition to salvation that man is left to himself to fulfill? Is grace God's contribution while faith is man's contribution? Is salvation wholly of God or does it ultimately depend upon something that we do for our salvation, namely, exercise our faith?

It was this issue that drove the Reformers. Did they believe in the hated doctrines of the sovereignty of God and election, doctrines that are mocked, maligned, and mutilated in our day? *They most certainly did!* Why? Because they believed in *sola scriptura*, which clearly declares that man fell so far that even his will was effected. As Paul



# Truth

## On Tough Texts

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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## The Five Solas of the Reformation (2)

### Selected Texts

**L**AST TIME WE BEGAN WHAT MUST BE A VERY brief look at the Reformation,<sup>1</sup> specifically, the five pillars of not only that event but Christianity itself. As we noted, the first was *sola scriptura*, the Scripture alone, which constitutes our only *model*. As we begin our sixth year of TOTT, we turn to the other four “solas.”

#### *Sola Fide, Our Only Means*

Habakkuk 2:4 declares: **Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.** The background of this verse is the conceit and arrogance of the Babylonians. The Hebrew behind **lifteth up** (*āpal*), which appears only here in the Old Testament, literally means “to swell.” They were, indeed, swollen, puffed up in their pride and self-confidence. In stark contrast, God declares that the righteous person will live by **faith**. So pivotal is this principle that it is quoted three times in the New Testament. By quoting this text in Romans 1:17, Paul says that *salvation* is by faith, in Galatians 3:11 he emphasizes that that salvation is *not by works*, and in Hebrews 10:38 he adds that we now *live* by faith in all things (see TOTT #11 & 12 for a defense of Pauline authorship of Hebrews).

It was, therefore, *sola fide* (faith alone) that became what has been called the “material principle” of the Reformation. While a “formal principle” (which was *sola scriptura* during the Reformation) speaks of the authority that forms and shapes an entire movement or system, a “material principle” is the *central teaching* of a movement or system. When properly defined and understood, a material principle provides indispensable help in understanding all

other teachings of the system. In other words, an entire doctrinal system can be explained in relationship to its material principle. As we saw in part 1, *sola scriptura* is the *model* (form and pattern) of salvation; we now see that *sola fide* is the only *means* (way, channel, agency) of salvation.

No other principle of Christianity, therefore, more encapsulates its entire system of doctrine than does *sola fide*. Salvation does not come by *works* (or faith *plus* works) which is the material principle of Catholicism and *all* religion; rather salvation comes through *faith alone*. Luther, in fact, stated, “The article with and by which the church stands, without which it falls.”<sup>2</sup> He went on to state about its pivotal place:

This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for an hour.<sup>3</sup>

So what was the Reformation about? *The Reformation was about a repudiation of the whole idea of human effort through his own works as a way to commend the sinner toward God and the recovery of the Gospel of faith in Christ alone.* As a note in the *Geneva Bible*, the Bible of Reformation, so well declared 400 years ago:

We are justified by faith without works, taken from the end of Justification. The end of Justification is the glory of God alone: therefore we are justified by faith without works: for if we were justified either by our own works only, or partly by faith, and partly by works, the glory of this justification should not be wholly given to God. (Comment on Rom. 3:27)