

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe." Martin Luther, Diet of Worms 1521.

Through Christ alone (Solo Christo)

Our salvation is accomplished by the person and mediating work of the historical Christ alone. While we are justified by God's grace, it is through our faith and belief in the life, death and resurrection of Christ alone that are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father. It is through Christ alone that we are made at-one with God by his taking our place in punishment for our sins, through his victory over evil and by his all-embracing love.

This principle emphasizes that salvation is made possible for humanity *only* by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Glory to God alone (Soli Deo Gloria)

The goal of our salvation is for God's glory because salvation is from God and has been accomplished by God. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for his glory alone. It is

necessary for our worship to focus on glorifying God, which we cannot properly do if we neglect the place of scripture in our teaching and allow self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfilment to become alternatives to the gospel.

In our worship we celebrate that *all the glory is due to God alone*, since he did all the work — not only in the atonement of Christ, but even granting us the faith as a gift which unites us to Christ and brings us into the salvation provided by his atonement.

Dates and Biblical References

Sunday 5 March – Introduction

Matthew 4:1-11; Romans 5:12-19

Sunday 12 March – By Faith alone

John 3:1-21; Galatians 3:1-14

Sunday 19 March – By Grace alone

Luke 18:9-17; Ephesians 2:1-10

Sunday 26 March – By Scripture alone

John 20:24-31; 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Sunday 2 April – Through Christ alone

Mark 10:35-45; Ephesians 1:1-14

Sunday 9 April – To the Glory of God alone

Matt. 21:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11

St. Bartholomew's Church, Ducklington

Remember the Reformation!

Lent 2017

When Martin Luther posted his "Ninety-five Theses" on the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, no one expected the breadth of evangelical reforms in Christian teaching and practice that followed. In every dimension of Christian faith a renewed trust in God's forgiving mercy replaced a reliance on teachings and practices that, like the sale of indulgences, were vulnerable to abuse and corruption.

Luther himself wrestled with the twin problems of how to reconcile his growing understanding of the Bible's teachings with the traditional teachings of the church and at some point, he came to understand that human beings are reconciled to God by his grace, received in faith, rather than by an individual's good works. "Works" of course, are the outcome of salvation, not the means.

As a summary of all that was discovered by the Reformers, the basic theological principles are summarised by five Latin expressions:

- **Sola fide** ("by faith alone")
- **Sola gratia**. ("by grace alone")
- **Sola scriptura** ("by Scripture alone")
- **Solo Christo** "through Christ alone")
- **Soli Deo gloria** ("glory to God alone")

We shall explore these during Lent, both in our Sunday sermons, and also in home groups, where we can freely investigate each of these principles and how they impact on our Christian life and witness. I hope our study together will help our understanding of the theological beliefs, which are the background to the formation of the Church of England, and are the foundations of our Protestant faith today.

Faith alone (Sola fide)

Justification, (being put right with God), is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This principle challenged the church's view that to be justified required both faith and good works. The Protestant view is that we are not saved *by* our good works, but are saved *for* good works. They are an outworking of our faith. In justification, Christ's righteousness is granted to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice, through our faith in him. Our justification does not rest on any merit to be found in us.

This was Martin Luther's cry in reference to Justification, our "right-standing" before God. Justification, he declared, is by faith alone, not faith plus anything else. Luther believed this was a critical doctrine and regarded it as the truth by which the church would either stand or fall.

Grace alone (Sola gratia)

In salvation, we are rescued from the just punishment for sin by God's grace alone, not earned by any effort we may make. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life, to live as God wants. Salvation is not in any sense a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. Faith in itself is a gift of God and is not produced by our human nature, emphasizing that our justification before God and our resulting salvation are both solely by the sovereign distinguishing grace of God and not dependant on any action or condition provided by man.

Grace can be thought of as "Gifts received at Christ's expense"

Scripture alone (Sola scriptura)

This emphasises the place of Scripture (the Bible) as the sole source of written divine revelation and authority. The Reformers placed Scripture as the primary source of God's authority and denied the idea of an infallible Church with its focus on tradition. They held that Scripture is the foundation upon which Tradition and Reason rest as tools to our interpretation and application of Scripture. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behaviour must be measured.

Scripture is the Church's only infallible and sufficient rule for deciding issues of faith and practices that involve doctrines. While the Bible does not contain all knowledge, it does contain that which is necessary for salvation. This view does not deny that the Church has the authority to teach God's Word. Furthermore, while tradition is valuable, it must be tested by the higher authority of the Scriptures. The only infallible rule of faith, they argued, "is found in the pages of Holy Writ."

In all of this, the role of the Holy Spirit is vital. The Word can only be received and obeyed by the Holy Spirit.