

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
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 Title: The Theology of the Church
 Text: Titus 1:5-16
 Theme: The Church is to know, contend for, and hold fast to sound doctrine for the building up of the body and for the saving of the unbelieving.

Its eternal significance:

Regardless as to what theological system you fall into in your understanding of God, His word, and His works, your thoughts concerning these things form the foundation for your understanding and interpretation of your life. Although I am theologically tolerant of many things, this is not to say that I do not have a theological structure or that I believe theological thinking is so elastic as to be sloppy and open-ended. I believe adamantly of the Bible's authority and ability to clearly state what God wants known. There are theological hills on which I will die, and have already died. Some of those "hills" will be noted in today's study.

The theology noted in today's sermon focuses primarily on the issue of salvation (i.e. justification). The historical context for each statement was in response to the Catholic doctrine of justification by works or by one's ability to merit salvation from sin. Thus what we will note centers on what we believe about the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we embark on this study, I desire to begin with a series of questions.

Questions:

1. How well do you know the person and work of Jesus Christ?
2. Is knowing the gospel essential to salvation?
3. Is the gospel essential to your sanctification or Christian walk?
4. Is our current age of idolizing the individual a result of losing the gospel?
5. How important is it for you that the church you attend know, contend for, and hold fast to sound doctrine?
6. How much latitude is tolerable in certain areas of theology before it becomes an issue of ecclesiastical separation or even damnable?

Introduction:

Martin Luther dealt the symbolic blow that began the Reformation when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church. That document contained an attack on papal abuses and the sale of indulgences by church officials.

But Luther himself saw the Reformation as something far more important than a revolt against ecclesiastical abuses. He believed it was a fight for the gospel. Luther even stated that he would have happily yielded every point of dispute to the Pope, if only the Pope had affirmed the gospel.

And at the heart of the gospel, in Luther's estimation, was the doctrine of justification by faith—the teaching that Christ's own righteousness is imputed to those who believe, and on that ground alone, they are accepted by God.

<http://www.educ.msu.edu/homepages/laurence/reformation/Luther/Luther.htm>

The present danger:

On April 20, 1996, The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals met to discuss and propose a formal document (The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals) that would celebrate and set forth the 5 sola statements of the Reformation as a defining document. They introduced the document with the following introductory remarks.

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.

The bulk of this study is from this confessional. It has been modified where necessary and held to when possible. It is fitting and proper that we speak of the theology of the Church on this day. There are various positions inside of the theological spectrum. Despite the variety, there are certain non-negotiable truths. The Reformers in Church history during the 1500's concluded there were five key ideas.

"The Five *solas* are five Latin phrases (or slogans) that emerged during the Protestant Reformation and summarize the Reformers' basic theological beliefs in contradistinction to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church of the day. The Latin word *sola* means "alone" in English. The five solas were what the Reformers believed to be the only things needed in their respective functions in Christian salvation. This formulation was intended to distinguish between what were viewed as deviations in the Christian church and the essentials of Christian life and practice." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_solas

The intent of this study is three-fold.

Mind: We must know what sound doctrine is. Can you identify what is sound and what is unwholesome?

Will: We must choose a systematic and intentional approach to studying the Scripture in order to know what to believe, what to contend for, and what to hold fast. Such a systematizing of Scripture does not always fit into our current labeling. No label is capable of holding all theological explanation.

Emotion: We must love the truth. A love for God is expressed in a love for His Words.

Let us consider the first of five non-negotiable truths by beginning with what is called *Sola Scriptura*.

I. Sola Scriptura - By Scripture Alone (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)

¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

What does this text mean when it says, "All Scripture is inspired by God?" Fundamentally it means that all we have in written form is sourced in and preserved by God the Holy Spirit.

"The rabbinical teaching was that the Spirit of God rested on and in the prophets and spoke through them, so that their words did not come from themselves but from the mouth of God; they spoke and wrote in the Holy Spirit. The early church was in entire agreement with this view." (Rogers & Rogers, 506).

The doctrine that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority was the . . .

"Formal Principle [or cause]" of the Reformation. In 1521 at the historic interrogation of Luther at the Diet of Worms, he declared his conscience to be captive to the Word of God saying, "Unless I am overcome with testimonies from Scripture or with evident reasons — for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils, since they have often erred and contradicted one another — I am overcome by the Scripture texts which I have adduced, and my conscience is bound by God's Word." <http://www.spiritone.com/~wing/5solas.htm>

What Luther stated is the spirit behind *Sola Scriptura*. It is impossible to exhaustively study the weight of biblical revelation in confirming the truth of "by Scripture Alone."

At least 60 times in the New Testament we read the statement, "It is written." The occurrence of the phrase, "says the Lord," is so numerous as to require refinement. Throughout Matthew's Gospel we read the formula, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (Matt. 1:22). The Bible speaks with an authority that is absolute and binding.

Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture and discipline. In the absence of this truth the basis for all biblical authority is eroded. The Bible is the only inspired and authoritative Word of God and is accessible to all.

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. Because it is the Word of God, it is clear and understandable. In

addition, as the Word of God it is rigid and absolute and not opinion based and changing.

The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. It is only as we understand the Word of God that we can properly understand our personal experiences. The objective Scripture is never under the authority of subjective experience. 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.

Therefore, 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 by revealing the person and work of Jesus Christ on His cross for deliverance from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and the presence of sin.

This brings us to our second of five non-negotiable truths, *Solus Christus*.

II. Solus Christus - In Christ Alone (Eph. 2:8-10; Col. 1:16, 17)

⁸ “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10).

¹⁶ “For **by Him** all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created **through Him and for Him**. ¹⁷ He is **before all things**, and **in Him all things hold together**” (Col. 1:16, 17).

“To say solus Christus does not mean that we do not believe in the Father or the Spirit, but it does insist that Christ is the only incarnate self-revelation of God and redeemer of humanity. The Holy Spirit does not draw attention to himself, but leads us to Christ, in whom we find our peace with God.”

http://www.monergism.com/updates/reformation_essentials_by_mich.php

There is nothing created or revealed that is not directly and immediately tied to Him for its existence. Culture, as a reflection of those made in His image, is created by Him and for Him. We must live in, use, and resist culture in any way that advances or diminishes the centrality of Jesus Christ over His creation. He is the sole mediator between God the Father and His people.

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values and Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision. In the absence of His supremacy there is an erosion of a Christ-centered faith.

It is only through the imputed righteousness of Christ placed on the sinner that anyone can stand before God. The action of imputation is by grace alone through faith alone.

We do not believe mankind's rescue from death and hell and reconciliation to the Father is, in any way, contingent on man doing anything. He contributes nothing to his justification. We must not allow the issue of by grace alone through faith alone to rob Christ of His supremacy in any aspect of our salvation whether it is for our justification, sanctification, or glorification.

Therefore, we reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

We deny that the gospel is preached if Christ's substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and his work is not solicited and man, in any way, becomes a co-contributor to his rescue from death and hell and reconciliation to the Father.

This brings us to our third of five non-negotiable truths, *Sola Gratia*.

III. Sola Gratia - By Grace Alone (Eph. 2:8-10)

⁸ **"For by grace you have been saved** through faith; and that **not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;** ⁹ **not as a result of works,** so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10).

Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature and an erosion of the Gospel. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world, from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works.

Why is grace so repugnant to the unbelieving? Grace is repugnant because it places man at the mercy of God. Listen carefully to the following statement found in the Human Manifesto II by Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson in 1973.

As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to live and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival.

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto2.html>

This cry for independence and self-autonomy is the cry of fallen man. This thinking beats within the soul of every sinner and saint alike. It is only when the sin nature of

man is overthrown by the power of the Holy Spirit that he will submit to the grace of God as revealed in the Gospel.

God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead, and apart from a divine work are non-desirous of coming to Christ alone for the salvation of their immortal soul.

How does this idea conflict with current thinking even as it did in the 1500's?

The difference lies mainly in two facts: that of God as sole actor in grace (in other words, that grace is always efficacious *without* any cooperation by man), and second, that man cannot by any action of his own, acting under the influence of grace, cooperate with grace to "merit" greater graces for himself (the latter would be the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church). This doctrine asserts divine monergism in salvation: God acts alone to save the sinner.

This does not in anyway exclude the working of God in and through the will of those who are saved. No one is saved who does not will to be saved and no one who wills to be saved can be lost.

Therefore, we reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by his grace alone. 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.

We deny that salvation is in any sense a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. [Saving] faith is not produced by our un-regenerated human nature.

This brings us to our fourth of five non-negotiable truths, *Sola Fide*.

IV. Sola Fide - By Faith Alone (Eph. 2:8-10)

⁸ "For by grace you have been saved **through faith**; and that **not of yourselves**, it is the gift of God; ⁹ **not as a result of works**, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10).

"The preposition [through] indicates the channel through which salvation comes. Faith is not viewed as a positive work or accomplishment of the individual." (Rogers & Rogers, 437).

"This doctrine is sometimes called the material cause of the Reformation because it was the central doctrinal issue for Martin Luther." http://www.theopedia.com/Five_Solas

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. 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.

There is nothing you can do to earn the favor of God. It is always and only because of who Christ is and what He has done that anyone is right with God. This work by Christ in behalf of His people is appropriated by faith. Because it is by grace, it must be through faith. If it were earned by works, then it would cease being grace.

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.

"This doctrine asserts the total exclusion of any other righteousness to justify the sinner other than the "alien" righteousness (righteousness of another) of Christ alone. *Sola fide* excludes even the sinner's own righteousness of sanctification or his "new obedience" from his justification." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_solas

The ability to have faith is rooted in the make-up of man. It is his volition, or the capacity to choose, that sets him apart from all other created things. All people, in every location, at all times, have the capacity for faith and exercise faith, but it is only God who can cause man to have a faith in Christ that results in his salvation. There is a necessary distinction between common or general faith and a faith that results in justification.

Therefore, 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.

This brings us to our fifth of five non-negotiable truths, *Soli Deo Gloria*.

V. Soli Deo Gloria - Glory To God Alone (Eph. 2:8-10; 3:20, 21)

⁸ "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, **so that no one may boast.** ¹⁰ For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10).

²⁰ "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ **to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.** Amen" (Eph. 3:20, 21).

"This great and all consuming purpose was emphasized by those in the 16th and 17th Centuries who sought to reform the church according to the Word of God. In contrast to the monastic division of life into sacred versus secular perpetuated by Roman Church, the reformers saw **all of life** to be lived under the Lordship of Christ. Every activity of the Christian is to be sanctified unto the glory of God."

<http://www.spiritone.com/~wing/5solas.htm>

Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing his work in our way. To the degree that God is displaced in our corporate assembly, to that degree He is not worshipped. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ, and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

As fallen people we continue to wrestle with who we are in relation to who He is. Somehow we continue to entertain the idea that we are vital to His redemptive purpose. As if, in our absence, God is unable to fulfill what He desires. Before we conclude too sharply what I mean by "vital," let me explain. If such thinking offends you, then I would ask that you give me some time to explain. If such truth confuses you, then you and I are able to journey together as we submit to Him in the outworking of His redemptive purpose to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation.

You and I are vital to the work of God in so far that He determined to use the likes of us to accomplish His purpose, but we are not vital in so far that He is waiting for us to act before He works. Issues of timing do not rest with man, but with God. Why God chooses to do what He does and when He does it, are not explainable by man. I do not have to understand nor figure it out for me to submit and obey what I know to be true.

Therefore, we reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory and that we must glorify him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for his glory alone.

We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we [confuse] Law and Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfillment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel.

APPLICATION: Making it Personal. What's the NEXT ACTION STEP?

As already noted, the 5 solas of the Reformation was in direct response to the Roman Catholic Church of the 1500's. Although we would alienate ourselves from the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, I wonder how the 5 solas address the church of today. Let me give us five questions.

1. Is the Scripture our sole authority of faith and practice?
2. Is Jesus Christ enough or are we turning to other things to gain us favor before God?
3. Is the favor of God bestowed upon us by grace alone through faith alone or are we turning to the works of man?
4. Is faith the sole means of securing the goodness of God upon us?
5. Is God's glory primary and exclusive or do we believe our own good works are reward worthy?

In light of your answer, let us consider three simple action steps.

1. Know what you believe through a systematic study of the Bible.
2. Live what you believe.
3. As a believer stop drifting and start planting. If you believe the biblical sincerity of this fellowship, then align yourself through membership, financial gifting, and missional ministry.