

The 5 Solas: Semper Reformanda

Galatians 1:3 ESV (Pg. 565) Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, **4** who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, **5** to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. **6** I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— **7** which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. **8** But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! **9** As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! **10** Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

- I. Many in the Western world confuse the way things are with the ways things have always been; taking advances in medicine, transportation, and technology for granted. But the things we enjoy have occupied a small portion of human history.
 - A. This is not only true of innovations, but institutions as well. Education, government and religious life are very different today 500, or 1,000 years ago.
 1. I'd like to examine Church history, so that we can look at where we've **been** to understand where we might be **going**, so we can correct our course.
 2. George Santayana famously said, "**Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.**" The church mustn't make the same mistakes.
 - a) Could there be a cycle of "truth-error-correction" that the church experiences from time to time? If so, what shape does that cycle take?
 - b) Where are we now in that cycle? We're going to look at this in our walk through history. and break it down for you further over the next 5 weeks.
 - B. After Christ ascended, he poured his Spirit on the church. 120 people gathered in the Upper Room (including the 11 Apostles), and were filled with power. Peter preached, and 3,000 people were added to the number of believers!
 1. That's impressive church growth! The others who were filled immediately and joyously began to proclaim the good news of Jesus throughout Judea.
 - a) **Acts 2:42 ESV** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **43** Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. **44** All the believers were together and had everything in common. **45** They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. **46** Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, **47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
 - b) An infant church was born! They embraced the teachings of Christ by the Apostles, and miracles confirmed the Word. They lived in transformative, exemplary community. And the church kept growing and growing!

2. Before long the Jews and Romans noticed this sect who worshipped a crucified Carpenter from a nowhere town called Nazareth. The Jews said they challenged Moses, and the Romans thought they challenged Caesar.
 - a) Soon many of them were arrested, beaten, imprisoned and killed. Riots broke out, and whole cities were in a uproar as the Word was proclaimed that “Jesus is Lord”! But nothing could stop the church! **Matthew 16:18b ESV I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**
 - b) One of the early persecutors, Saul of Tarsus, was confronted by Jesus himself as he was going to arrest Christ’s followers. But he himself was arrested by the resurrected Lord and was given a “life sentence” which he gladly served until he was beheaded by Nero several years later.
- C. Saul became Paul, and with Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Peter and Jude wrote the story of Jesus and doctrines explaining the meaning of his life.
 1. These letters to various churches became known as the New Testament; the teachings it contained were based on the prophetic promises of the Old Testament, all fulfilled by Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension.
 2. The gathered church has affirmed these writings to be the Word of God, equal with the Old Testament, many times throughout Church history.
- D. In the centuries after the apostles’ died, the gospel spread throughout Asia minor, Europe, and Northern Africa. Church Fathers like John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Basil, Jerome, and Athanasius defended the fledgling faith against heresies that threatened to upend the purity of the gospel.
 1. Contemporary to these men, Emperor Constantine ceased all state persecution of Christians in 313AD. After his death, Theodosius I made Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire in 380AD.
 2. A band of 120 persons became the official religion of the Roman world in less than 350 years with no printing press or electronic communication; simply by proclaiming and defending the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and being willing to die for the truths they believed.
- E. But unfortunately, this new found freedom was not always a good thing. The liberated church became fat and lazy very quickly. Fewer people were speaking up against the heresies that threatened the church with corruption.
 1. People began to politically organize the church, rising as regional bishops, accruing power and wealth, and abandoning Christ’s words to his disciples.
 2. **Luke 9:1 ESV When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3 He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt”.** The Bishop of Rome particularly gained great prominence.
- II. By the 6th century, the Bishop of Rome claimed authority over the whole Church. He was the pope, the “Holy Father”, superior to all other Bishops, because he could lay dubious claim to a line of succession from the Apostle Peter. This only led to more power and wealth being acquired. But the Popes of the early middle ages claimed authority, not only over religious affairs, but governmental as well.
 - A. Pope Innocent III said, “The successor of Peter is the Vicar of Christ; he has been established as the mediator between God and man, below God but

beyond man; less than God, but more than man; who shall judge all and shall be judged by no one.²” To be the Vicar of Christ means to stand in his place!

1. This kind of declaration was easy to make because most people in Europe were illiterate, had no access to scriptures, and were widely superstitious.
 2. “The papacy’s chief weapon in support of this authority were spiritual penalties. Almost everyone believed in heaven and hell and in the pope’s management of the grace (necessary) to get to one and avoid the other.”³
 - a) The pope could excommunicate people from the church, meaning no chance of salvation; or he could keep a soul in purgatory for centuries, working off all of it’s damning sins in torment. Though these concepts have no biblical basis, all Europe was held prisoner by them for centuries.
 - b) There were no nations as we think of them, only city-states and regional dominions, so only the pope had universal power⁴. Others ruled at the pleasure of the pope, who had his own lands and commanded armies.
 3. Furthermore, people did not have freedom to dissent religiously either. There were no other denominations to turn to. Only the universal, Catholic church.
 4. These were the dark ages, and though there were brave and educated people who spoke up, and tried to bring reform, they were usually excommunicated, persecuted, exiled or martyred. (Wycliffe and Hus).
- B. As time dragged on, popes claimed more power, wealth, and authority for themselves, as they heaped burdens and blasphemies upon God’s people.
1. For example, peasants and commoners were required by law to attend the mass, but when they got there, it was presented only in Latin, and not in the familiar tongue of the people. They had no idea what it meant!
 - a) In order to study the scriptures for yourself, you had to be able to read, which the feudal system made highly unlikely. You must also know Latin.
 - b) If you were fortunate enough to be literate, you could own a Latin Bible, but they were expensive, and you were forbidden to interpret it in any way that contradicted the Roman church’s conclusions on any matter.
 2. The mass was (and is!) a desecration of the gospel, teaching the bread and wine were actually a continuation of Christ’s sacrifice, the elements being literally the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ! This predisposes God to be gracious to those for whom it was offered⁵. This completely ignores both the Hebrews writer’s teaching that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was “once for all”, and the words of Christ **John 19:30b ESV** “It is finished.”
 3. People were taught submission to the pope was necessary for salvation⁶. The popes substituted simple trust in the work of Jesus for salvation with the selling of indulgences (documents sold with the promise of grace allotted to lessen a loved one’s time in purgatory). Johann Tetzel, a villain of the later middle ages, would go about selling indulgences with these words, “As soon as the gold in the casket (coffer) rings, the rescued soul to heaven springs”⁷.
- III. By the dawn of the 16th Century, the Catholic Church was ripe for a reformation. The instigator of that reformation was a German named Martin Luther. Luther was a law student when a terrifying experience in a thunderstorm in 1505 caused him to cry out to Saint Anne, pledging that if she saved him, he would become a monk⁸.

- A. This was no casual religious vow. He abandoned his studies and threw himself into monastic life. He wrecked his health trying to be perfect; praying for hours on end, staying up all night. He would beat himself and deny himself creature comforts like blankets so that he could “punish the sin” out of his flesh⁹.
 - 1. He was known for going to confess to the priest daily. sometimes confessing for 6 hours a day, exhausting the priests who had to sit patiently and listen¹⁰!
 - a) The priests actually began to forbid him to come unless he had something “big” to confess, like murder or adultery¹¹.
 - b) But this wouldn’t do. He was convinced that God was perfectly holy, so he must also be perfectly just. He didn’t give himself any outs for his sins, big or small, and would do anything to clear himself, but to no avail.
 - 2. This perfectionism nearly drove him mad, When people would ask him about the love of God, he would reply, “Love God? Sometimes I hate him.”¹² But he couldn’t ignore what the scriptures said about God’s holy demands.
 - B. But all of this changed when Luther was trying to understand Paul’s letter to the Romans, wherein he came upon this verse. **Romans 1:16 ESV** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. **17** For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: **“The righteous will live by faith.”**
 - 1. That phrase, “The righteous will live by faith”, burrowed into him like a acorn, and he saw for the first time that a man doesn’t become righteous by what he does or doesn’t do, but by placing his faith in what Christ has done.
 - 2. It didn’t take long for that acorn to take root and begin to grow into a mighty oak of truth. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed a document to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany containing 95 arguments he wanted to debate concerning the authority of the pope, the selling of indulgences, and the nature of salvation and the Christian life.
 - a) This was the beginning of what we call the Protestant Reformation (a direct challenge to the Catholic Church). Over the following decades, with much pain and persecution, this reformation spread throughout Europe.
 - b) It was carried on by men such as Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin in Switzerland, William Tyndale in England, and John Knox in Scotland.
- IV. Out of this reformation came five distinct doctrines that etched a clear line of demarcation between the Catholic Church and the burgeoning reformation (called “Protestants”). These were all stated in the Latin of the day as Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone), Solus Christus (Christ Alone), Sola Gratia (Grace Alone), Sola Fide (Faith Alone) and Soli Deo Gloria (To the Glory of God Alone).
- A. **Sola Scriptura** meant that the final authority in the life of believers was scripture alone; not the pronouncements of popes, councils, or creeds nor the traditions of the church. Sola Scriptura also insists that every believer should have access to the Bible, and be taught to interpret it for themselves. It insists scripture is authoritative, inerrant, and sufficient for everything we need to know about God.
 - B. **Solus Christus** declares the absolute headship of Christ over his church, and that he is the sole mediator between God and man. He does not place pope, priest, pastor or any other person in that exclusive role. All believers have direct

- access to him. As such it is entirely unnecessary and ineffective to pray to saints and angels, for he alone intercedes for the church, answering her prayers.
- C. **Sola Gratia** teaches that salvation is extended to men and women, boys and girls by the free, electing grace of God alone. No one can earn it by their own merit, or by the surplus merit of dead saints or of others. God only saves sinners because he is good, and never because we have been good enough.
 - D. **Sola Fide** says we're saved by placing our faith in God's love shown by Jesus on the cross. We're made righteous by trusting him. Luther said justification by faith alone is "the article upon which the church stands or falls"¹³.
 - E. **Soli Deo Gloria** is the over-arching proclamation that all of this is to the praise of God alone. All the work of salvation is accomplished for one purpose - that he might glorified in us through Christ, the Son. It is his one eternal aim.
- V. We're going to spend the next 5 weeks analyzing these truths in greater detail, but you might be asking, "Why is this necessary? After all, wasn't this all settled in the 16th century?" Consider another Latin Phrase from the Reformation: "ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda". It means "**The church reformed, always reforming**". It was coined by a Dutch minister named Jodocus van Lodenstein in 1674¹⁴.
- A. What he meant was that because of human sin, and the drift of our hearts, we must always be reforming. "Reforming" doesn't mean that we should always be changing, discovering something new. It means that we should be returning to truths that are timeless and eternal. This is what the 16th century reformers did. The Church had become corrupt because of man-made power structures, and brave men like Luther and others called her back to the purity of the scriptures.
 1. In an age where many sermons are nothing more than self-help motivation speeches, or highly subjective spiritual experiences are touted as authoritative, we need to remember that God is revealed in scripture alone.
 2. In a church where preachers, authors, and musicians become celebrities, and where Christians look more like the world than the Savior, we need to be reminded of the beauty and value of Christ alone and above all.
 3. When the purveyors of the so-called prosperity gospel promise material wealth and physical health in exchange for financial gifts, we need to remember we are saved by the boundless, unmerited Grace of God alone.
 4. In a success driven, perfectionistic world that measures or worth by our performance, we must return to simple belief and faith in Jesus alone.
 5. When we are tempted to esteem ourselves more highly than we ought to, or to fight to carve out a name for ourselves, or to build a legacy for ourselves, let us be found living, and perhaps dying, for the Glory of God alone!
 - B. In our test this morning, Paul pronounces a curse on those who would proclaim a different gospel than the one the Apostles proclaimed. Whether it's the Catholicism of the dark ages, or the attractionalism and humanism of the 21st Century, the 5 Solas can call us back to what mattered from the beginning.
 - C. Do we still need these 5 Solas? I think we do. I think it's time for a new reformation. Lord Jesus, let it begin at North Ridge Life Church! **Semper Reformanda!** May we always be reforming and returning to the Holy Word!
- VI. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he

had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

VII. Benediction: **Numbers 6:24 ESV** “The Lord bless you and keep you; **25** the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; **26** the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

¹ Acts 2:1-41

² *Church History in Plain Language*; by Bruce L. Shelley; Pg. 185; © 2008 Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN

³ *ibid*

⁴ *Church History in Plain Language*; by Bruce L. Shelley; Pg. 216; © 2008 Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN

⁵ *Church History in Plain Language*; by Bruce L. Shelley; Pg. 202; © 2008 Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN

⁶ *ibid* (see also pg. 206)

⁷ See Johann Tetzel: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Tetzel

⁸ *The Holiness of God*; by R.C. Sproul; Pp.115-116; © 1985 Living Books (™ of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), Wheaton, IL.

⁹ *The Holiness of God*; by R.C. Sproul; Pp.127-128; © 1985 Living Books (™ of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), Wheaton, IL.

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *The Holiness of God*; by R.C. Sproul; Pp.129-130; © 1985 Living Books (™ of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), Wheaton, IL.

¹² *The Holiness of God*; by R.C. Sproul; Pg.113; © 1985 Living Books (™ of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), Wheaton, IL.

¹³ *The Holiness of God*; by R.C. Sproul; Pg. 144; © 1985 Living Books (™ of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), Wheaton, IL.

¹⁴ Read this great article for more on “Semper Reformanda”: <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-semper-reformanda-mean/>