

MCBC (November 11, 2017)

Soli Deo Gloria: The End of Our Salvation & the Eternal Song of the Redeemed

This year marks the Quincentennial of the Reformation.

- We've already had a good rehearsal of the historical events in previous messages.
- But I do want to give just a brief overview of the theological significance of the five truths we've been focusing on—known, of course, as the five *solas*.

The heart and soul of the *Reformation* was soteriology—the doctrine of salvation.

- The engine that drove the Reformers was the question raised 15 centuries earlier by a prison guard in Philippi: *What must I do to be saved?*
- That's why, at the heart of the Reformation were 5 core truths that also lay at the heart of how to be put right with God.
 - Scripture: the authority on salvation
 - Faith: the means of salvation
 - Grace: the basis of salvation
 - Christ: the agent/mediator of salvation
 - God's Glory: the motive/end of salvation

But those truths became distorted over time and to such an extent that a Reformation—indeed, a theological Revolution—became necessary.

Distorting and corrupting the core of the Gospel was not a new phenomenon pioneered through Romanism. It is an old, old strategy. Paul addressed the same problem when he expressed his astonishment at the Galatians for

so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;
⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (Gal 1:6-7 NAU).

That word “distort” doesn't just mean to tweak or twist something; it means to completely change the nature of the thing.

Years ago when Pastor Minnick preached through Galatians he pointed out that this kind of “distortion” can be accomplished in several different ways:

- By redefining the terms
- By subtracting some of truth
- By inserting error in place of some of the truth
- By piggy-backing error along with truth

That last kind of distortion is especially what happened to those core truths within Romanism.

- Scripture was supplanted by ***tradition***
- Faith was overshadowed by the role of ***works***
- Grace was swallowed up by the requirement of ***merit***, especially the borrowed merit of Mary and other saints

- Christ was superseded by the **church** as the necessary mediator between man and God; so that
- God's glory in salvation ended up being eclipsed by **man's glory** (*achievement*).

So the distortion of those core gospel truths is why each one had to be fenced by the word *sola*:

- ***sola scriptura***
- ***sola fide***
- ***sola gratia***
- ***solus Christus***
- ***soli deo gloria***

Sometimes these five *solas* are described as “the battle cry of the Reformation.” Yes and no.

- Three of those terms (*sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*) do occur frequently throughout many early 16th-century Protestant texts.
- The phrases *solus Christus* and *soli Deo gloria* don't seem to show up in Protestant theological treatises until later, even though the Reformers obviously wrote a great deal about Christ and God's glory.
- So the biblical *principles* captured in these five summary mottos were very much at the heart of what the Reformation was about.
- But they were not compiled into a single, comprehensive list as distinctive core emphases of the Reformation until later.

All five *solas* revolve around salvation, being put in right relationship with God.

- The first *sola* answers “Who says? How can we know? What's the ultimate authority on this question?”
- The three middle *solas* answer “How do we get it?” We are saved:
 - *By grace alone*
 - *Through faith alone*
 - *In Christ alone*
- The last *sola* answers “Why? What is God's ultimate goal in doing this?”
 - The answer is, for His own glory alone.

That's the one we are occupied with this morning.

Most of you know the name Jonathan Edwards—18th century New England pastor, widely regarded even by secular historians as one of the greatest theological and philosophical thinkers America has ever produced.

- One of his most valuable essays is titled, “The End for Which God Created the World.”
- That End, he demonstrates both logically and scripturally, is the glory of God.
- Some people, even some theologians, object that for God's ultimate motive—either in creation or redemption—to be His own glory is selfish, egotistical, narcissistic.
- After all, when we do things for our own glory, it is rightly considered to be conceited, not to mention sinful.

- But this objection overlooks two tiny stubborn facts: (a) God is not fallen, and cannot sin; and (b) we are not God.
- If God is the only God, there is nothing outside Himself that is greater than Himself; so to put anything before Himself would be to admit that there is something other than Himself that is greater and worthier than Himself.
- And if God Himself is the greatest good, then there is nothing greater that He could give to us than Himself, and nothing greater that He could do for us than to show to us and to share with us His glory.

God's glory is shown when he gives himself for others, and there is nothing better that he could give to others than himself... He is loving us *by* seeking his own glory, and he is seeking his own glory and acting according to his nature *by* loving us. As Jonathan Edwards wrote ... "God acting for *himself*, or making himself his last end, and his acting for [*our*] sake, are not to be set in opposition; they are rather to be considered as coinciding with one another, and implied one in the other." [Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 561]

So where does one turn to demonstrate that God's goal in all things—including salvation—is His own glory? Jonathan Edwards cites and discusses scores of passages in his essay. And the fact is, all the *solas* are taught and illustrated throughout the NT.

- Paul's letter to the Romans was, of course, central to the Reformation.
- Another vital NT epistle that influenced the Reformers was the letter to the Galatians.

I want to direct our attention this morning to another of Paul's letters. Turn to Ephesians 1.

The 5th *sola*—*Soli Deo Gloria*—is woven throughout this passage and climaxes in ch. 3.

- The secret to seeing it lies in the pronouns and identifying exactly who the pronouns belong to, and who is doing the actions described in the passage.

But I need to start with a caveat; and the best way to state that caveat is by rehearsing two of our church catechism questions.

Q 12 asks "How many Gods are there?" Can you say the **short** answer with me?

- *We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there is only one living and true God.*

But we also believe that the one true God is a Trinity—one God in three persons. Why do we believe that?

Well, let's rehearse Q 13 of our catechism, with the **long** answer this time: "How do we know that God exists in three persons?"

- *We know that God exists in three persons because they are distinguished in Scripture by their personal relations with one another, and by their distinctive works.*

What that means is that because all three persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—are one and the same unified Being of God, there is a sense in which an act by one is an act by all.

And yet, in some passages (like Ephesians), God very explicitly distinguishes between particular works that uniquely belong to one person in the Godhead.

Now, we are accustomed to thinking very Christocentrically; and that's appropriate.

- The NT is a Christocentric document.
- Ephesians is, of course, full of Christ.
 - V. 3—we are blessed with every spiritual blessing **in Christ**
 - V. 4—We were chosen **in Him**
 - V. 6—we are blessed [graced] **in the Beloved**
 - V. 7—we have redemption through **His blood**

But Christ Himself said that His mission was *to glorify the **Father***.

- And if you read carefully this passage before us, what you discover is that—for all that it has to say about Christ—it is not a Christocentric passage.
- It is a Patricentric passage—a passage centered specifically on God the **Father**—**His** actions and **His** motives as the Planner and the Provider, the Originator and **Exec**utor not just of creation, but of our salvation.
- In this passage the Father is the primary Actor, the Subject of nearly all the verbs.
- Trace the grammar of Paul's very extended sentences closely, and you discover that most of the actions and descriptions that we instinctively tend to attribute to Christ, the text actually attributes to the Father.

So let's just trace Paul's thoughts—which are God's thoughts—through the text and see what it teaches us about God the Father.

- This is not new to most of us.
- Many of you were here when Pastor took us through the book of Ephesians several years ago.
- We have a hymn in our hymnbook, written by our pastor, celebrating this entire passage.

After the introduction in vv. 1-2, Paul composes a single sentence that runs from v. 3 down to v. 14, though most translations (including the NAS), have broken that up into several sentences to try to make it more manageable for us.

1:3-14—A Hymn of Praise to God the Father (*one sentence, three stanzas*)

Stanza 1: What the **Father** Did for Us Before Creation (1:3-6)

³ Blessed *be* the **God and Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

⁴ just as **He chose us** in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before **Him**. In love

⁵ **He predestined us** to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to **Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will,

⁶ **to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which **He freely bestowed on us** in the Beloved.

Stanza 2: What the **Father** Did for Us through the Son's Sacrifice (1:6-12)

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to **the riches of His grace**

⁸ which **He lavished on us**. In all wisdom and insight

⁹ **He made known to us** the mystery of **His will**, according to **His kind intention** which **He purposed in Him**

¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, [now that's a complex phrase in the NAS; it simply means (going back to v. 9) that the Father has now revealed His intention, out of his good pleasure, which he planned to accomplish through Christ, and which he will accomplish when the time is ripe] **namely, the summing up of all things** in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**,

¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be **to the praise of His glory**.

Stanza 3: What the **Father** Did for Us at Our Conversion (1:12-14)

¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, **you were sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own possession*, **to the praise of His glory**.

Ephesians contains the most concentrated focus on God the Father anywhere in the NT.

- If my count is correct, there are over **50** nominal/pronominal references to God the Father (over **80** when you include the understood subject of many verbals).
- By contrast, Colossians has about this many references to **Christ**.

The emphasis on the Father's **initiation** of salvation is underscored by (a) the verbal activities attributed to the Father, and (2) clustered references to God's own sovereign *purpose, counsel, will* (1:5, 9, 11; 3:11).

The piling up of phrases on top of one another reinforces God's sovereign initiative:

- *He* chose before the world's foundation (1:5)
- *He* predestined according to the good pleasure of *His* will (1:5)
- *His* grace (1:6, 7)
- *His* will...*His* good pleasure (1:9)
- *His* purpose...*His* will (1:11)

- Paul in this letter compels our protracted attention to the active, initiatory role of God the Father in redemption.
- Everything from election and predestination, all the way through to glorification is motivated by the Father's love and rooted in the Father's will to accomplish an eternal purpose, a goal, a design, an intention, an end ... which is what?

Three stanzas—and how does each stanza end?

- 1:6—to the praise of his glorious grace
- 1:12—to the praise of His glory

- 1:14—to the praise of His glory

Question: *Who will do all that praising?* We'll come back to that question later. For now, let's continue our journey through this letter.

1:15-23—Prayer to God the Father (*one sentence*)

- That the **Father** would enable us to *comprehend* our astonishingly privileged position because of all **He** has done for us.

¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints,

¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers;

¹⁷ that the **God** of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of glory**, **may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation** in the knowledge of **Him**.

¹⁸ *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is **the hope of His calling**, what are **the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints**,

¹⁹ and what is **the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe**. *These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might*

²⁰ which **He brought about** in Christ, when **He raised** Him from the dead **and [when He] seated** Him at **His right hand** in the heavenly *places*,

²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

²² And **He put all things in subjection** under His feet, **and [He] gave** Him as head over all things to the church,

²³ which is His body, the fullness of **Him who fills all in all**.

2:1-22—Exposition of God the Father's Work in/through Christ

Ephesians 2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

⁴ **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,**

⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together** with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

⁶ **and raised us up** with Him, **and seated us** with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

⁷ so that in the ages to come **He might show the surpassing riches [the extravagant wealth, not of His possessions, but] of His grace in kindness toward us** in Christ Jesus.

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.

For the sake of time, drop down to ch. 3.

3:1-13—Revelation of God the Father's Ultimate Purpose

- Or, if you will, "The End for Which God Redeemed His People"
- To make known the **Father's** multi-faceted wisdom [His glory]

⁷ of which **I was made a minister**, according to **the gift of God's grace** which **was given to me** according to **the working of His power**.

⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, **this grace was given**, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

⁹ and to bring to light what is **the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;**

¹⁰ so that **the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known** through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.

This is not an afterthought. This is not a peripheral issue. This is not a mere by-product of God's creative or redemptive work.

¹¹ *This was* in accordance with **the eternal purpose which He carried out** in Christ Jesus our Lord,

¹² in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

I often describe this passage as a wardrobe door (not that most people know what that is any more, unless you've read C. S. Lewis) through which we can catch a glimpse of an invisible but parallel reality.

- I've written about this more fully in my book *Not by Chance*, so if you've read that please forgive the repetition here.
- V. 10 says that God makes known his manifold wisdom **to the angels through the church**.
- This sounds odd to us.
 - We assume angels already know everything there is to know about God.
 - But they are created, like us, not eternal.
 - They're finite like us, not infinite.
 - They're limited, like us, not omniscient.
 - They are God's servants, just like us.
 - There are things God does to reveal His mind and character and attributes and glory to them, just as He does to reveal Himself to us.

Charles Bridges, citing this passage in Eph. 3, opens his classic work on *The Christian Ministry* with these words:

The Church is the mirror that reflects the whole effulgence of the Divine character. It is the grand scene in which the perfections of Jehovah are displayed to the universe. The revelations made to the Church—the successive grand events in her history and, above all, the manifestation of “the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ”—furnish even to the heavenly intelligences fresh subjects of adoring contemplation.

He has peered through that wardrobe door; he has visited that parallel world.

3:14-19—[Another] Prayer to God the Father

- That we would be full of **God**.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the **Father**,

¹⁶ that **He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,**

¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

3:20-21—Final Benediction to God the Father

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.

For our last few minutes, let's fast-forward to those future generations. Turn to Rev. 4.

Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and **One sitting on the throne**.

³ And **He who was sitting** was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.

...
⁵ OUT FROM THE THRONE come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder...

....
⁶ and BEFORE THE THRONE *there was something* like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

...
⁸ And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* **THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME**."

⁹ And when the living creatures **give glory** and honor and thanks **to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever**,

¹⁰ the twenty-four elders will fall down before **Him who sits on the throne**, and will worship **Him who lives forever and ever**, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ "**Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory** and honor and power; for **You created all things**, and **because of Your will** they existed, and were created."

Who, exactly, is the one seated on this throne in heaven? Keep looking.

Revelation 5:1 I saw **in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne** a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.

⁴ Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;

⁵ and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

⁶ And I saw between the **throne** (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

⁷ And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

So who is the one seated on the throne? God the Father. But keep watching. (Not just reading; keep *watching*. This is a vision, a preview—in our vernacular, a trailer.)

⁸ When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for **God** with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

¹⁰ "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our **God**; and they will reign upon the earth."

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,

¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and **glory** and blessing."

¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "**To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and **glory** and dominion forever and ever.**"

¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Let me come back to a question I raised earlier: *Who is doing all this praising?*

- The four living creatures (angelic creatures)
- The twenty-four elders (representatives of the combined people of God)
- Myriads of angels
- Every creature in heaven and on earth and in the sea

And for what, precisely are they praising the Lamb?

- 5:9—*you are worthy because you were slain and by your blood ransomed people for God*
- 5:12—*worthy is the Lamb who was slain*
- I.e., they're praising Him for His redemptive self-sacrifice

I grew up under the era of Pastor Boyd; one of his local titles was The Emender of Hymns. Because we do need to be alert to the scripturalness (or not) of what we sing.

Sometimes poetic imagery and expression can supplant scriptural reality.

There's an old gospel hymn with these lyrics:

- *Holy, holy, is what the angels sing,
And I expect to help them make the courts of heaven ring;
But when I sing redemption's story, they will fold their wings,
For angels never felt the joys that our salvation brings.*

That's very poetic and picturesque; and I suppose that last line is true.

But the one before is not.

- In Rev. 5, when we are singing redemption's story, the angels are not standing silently with folded wings.
- **They're** helping **us** make the courts of heaven ring. Why?
- Because of what we saw back in Ephesians 3:10—*angels learn about the character and wisdom and glory of God through watching the redemptive work of God in and for the church.*

Rev. 7

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, **standing before the throne and before the Lamb**, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands;

¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "**Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.**"

¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces **before the throne and worshiped God,**

¹² saying, "Amen, blessing and **glory** and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our **God** forever and ever. Amen."

Rev. 19 (last passage)

Revelation 19:1 After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "**Hallelujah!** Salvation and **glory** and power belong to our God;

...
⁴ And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped **God who sits on the throne** saying, "Amen. **Hallelujah!**"

⁵ And a voice came from the throne, saying, "**Give praise to our God**, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."

⁶ Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "**Hallelujah!** For **the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.**"

⁷ "Let us rejoice and be glad and **give the glory to Him**, for the marriage of the Lamb [the Beloved in Ephesians 1] has come and His bride has made herself ready."

That's the coming reality. That's where all this is going.

That's why God has made salvation

- by grace alone
- though faith alone
- in Christ alone
- on the basis of His Word alone
- So that it is all to His glory alone.

Conclusion

God's purpose in salvation is not ultimately rooted in us. Thank God for that.

It is because God's eternal purpose in redeeming us is rooted not in us but *in His determination* to magnify *His own glory*, that the failure of your salvation is **impossible** if you are *in Christ*.

Soli Deo Gloria, like all the other *solas*, is the ground of your assurance and the guarantee of your security in Christ.

As a church we have been studying through John Bunyan's classic *The Holy War* in SS. Perhaps its heavy allegory has overstimulated my imagination, but I want to try to illustrate the *Solas* this way.

In Acts 27, Luke records that the ship carrying Paul to Rome was blown off-course by a violent storm for 2 weeks.

- Their ship was battered, they were low on supplies, they didn't know where they were.

- Then one night in the pitch black the sailors could hear waves breaking on a nearby rocky shore.

Luke writes,

²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern (Act 27:29 ESV)

The sailors cast out 4 anchors so their ship wouldn't founder on the rocky shore that night; it eventually did, but at least it was in daylight so they could see the land and no one perished.

If you have put your faith in Christ alone by grace alone based on Scripture alone, you are on board His Majesty's Ship the *Soli Deo Gloria*.

- It has four anchors; Bunyan would name them:
 - Scripture Only
 - Grace Alone
 - *Sola Fide*
 - Finished Work of Christ
- They are the anchors of our confidence and assurance.
- But the best news of all is that it impossible for this ship to founder.
- It will unfailingly reach its destination, along with everyone on board.
- This is the *Soli Deo Gloria*, and Christ is the captain.

God does not just want to save you; He wants you to *know* that He has saved you.

1Jo 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

That's what the *solas* of the Reformation are all about, and therein lies their glory.

Your assurance of acceptance with God, your security in the salvation of your soul, your confidence that you have direct access to the very presence of God whenever you pray, the certainty of your eternal destiny, are grounded

- *sola scriptura*—not in the whims of men, but the words of God alone
- *solus Christus*—not on the decisions of a church, but the sacrifice of Christ alone
- *sola fide*—not in your own feeble efforts, but simple faith in the finished work of Christ
- *sola gratia*—not on any human merit, but the pure grace of God alone
- *soli Deo Gloria*—not in your own worthiness, but the glory of God

So that in the ages to come, He might put on display the extravagant wealth of His grace, by showing infinite and eternal kindness to us in Christ Jesus ... to the praise of His glory.

There is no greater ground for assurance, or gratitude, than that.