

The Five Solas (2017): Soli Deo Gloria

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[0 : 00] This is a copy of God's Word, which I hope you have with you, that it's well read and treasured in your heart. Turn with me to the book of Romans chapter 11, verse 33.

Today we're going to conclude our series on the solas of the Reformation. And I'm going to preach from selected texts today.

I'm going to bounce this around a lot, which is not typically what I enjoy doing. But I think to deal with the glory of God alone, we need to do so thematically this morning.

And so I want to begin our study with a reading from Romans 11, verses 33 through 36. And then we're going to leave it. I'll probably read it again in summary.

But I just want you to know, don't be thrown off when you go, wait, Nathan's not talking about Romans 11, 33 through 36. We'll bring other scripture. And I want you to get ready, nimble fingers, to turn to other places with me this morning.

[1 : 05] But I hope that this text will help draw your mind to the glory of God and the salvation of His people. As Paul has spent the first 11 chapters of this great letter to the church in Rome, outlining what the gospel is.

Our great need for justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And then he writes this, beginning in verse 33 and following.

Oh, the depths of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be glory forever. Amen. On Tuesday, we will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Specifically, on the 31st, we celebrate the day that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church.

[2 : 22] The 95 theses was a document outlining 95 reasons why the selling of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church was not biblical.

The prologue to this document reads as follows. Out of love for the truth and from desire to explain it, the Reverend Father Martin Luther, Master of Arts and Sacred Theology, an ordinary lecturer therein at Wittenberg, intends to defend the following statements and to dispute on them in that place.

Therefore, he asks that those who cannot be present and dispute with him orally shall do so in their absence by letter. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we outlined his reasons and we will not get into them, although you can find good English translations of them all over the place. It's online. It's especially easy to Google search this month.

One of the major concerns that Martin Luther had was that the selling of indulgences, the teaching that justification could come by works of one kind or another, were a degradation to the glory of God.

[3 : 39] That maximized man and his work and it minimized God's working. What precipitated from this document ignited a flame of doctrinal purification in Europe.

And we are beneficiaries of this purification. God used the reformation in mighty ways that we might believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, much of the reformers' teaching has been summed up systematically in what are known as the solas. The reformers didn't write it systematically in the way that we are studying it across these past weeks.

But we've brought it together. We've encapsulated it in this way. The reformers loved the word alone or only because recall that they were speaking to audiences that considered themselves

Christian.

There was not opposition in the day to Scripture or grace or faith or Christ or the glory of God. But there was so much addition to or subtraction from these key doctrines that the reformers loved to say only.

[5 : 02] So a number of weeks ago, five weeks ago, we picked up the topic of sola scriptura. That is to say that the Bible is our final authority.

It's the reigning authority over all other authorities. So the Scripture alone is our authority. And it teaches us that we are justified, have a right standing before God by grace alone, sola gratia, through faith alone, sola fide, with the proper object of that faith being Christ, in Christ alone, sola Christus.

And all things are for the glory of God alone, sola deo gloria. As we end this series with a consideration of sola deo gloria, know that we very well could have began our series with it.

God's glory is His renown or His fame. And while we cannot make God more glorious than He already is, we can mitigate it in our own hearts and to the detriment of others.

This was the predominant issue of the Reformation. The glory of God expressed in the life of the church.

[6 : 25] What do we believe to be true? And how does our doctrine either shed a proper light on the glory of God or lessen it, in a sense I'll get into momentarily?

A book I want to commend to you, but I'm not going to give to you, this morning anyway, written by John Piper in a series he did called The Swans Are Not Silence. There's a series of biographies. This one's called The Legacy of Sovereign Joy. He writes of an example from John Calvin's life. He writes, In 1538, the Italian cardinal Sadele wrote to the leaders of Geneva trying to win them back to the Roman Catholic Church after they had turned to the Reformed teachings.

He began his letter with a long conciliatory section on the preciousness of eternal life before coming to his accusations of the Reformation. Calvin wrote the response to Sadele in six days in the fall of 1539.

It was one of his earliest writings and spread his name as a Reformer across Europe. Luther read it and said, Here is a writing which has hands and feet.

[7 : 40] I rejoice that God raises up such men. So Calvin writes this response to this cardinal who's trying to draw the Reformer leaders back to Roman Catholicism.

And his response to a teaching that said that justification was not by grace through faith in Christ was this, and I quote, Your zeal for heavenly life is a zeal which keeps a man entirely devoted to himself and does not, even by one expression, arouse him to sanctify the name of God.

There he goes on to say that the goal of every person's life ought to be to set before man as the prime motive of his existence zeal to illustrate the glory of God.

To make much of God. To know God as he is and to help others to know God as he is. This was the great cry of the Reformation.

So we could have also started with Soli Deo Gloria, but it's also apt to end with this theme, this idea of to God alone be the glory.

[9 : 04] Now the Bible reveals God's glory in two ways. And this will be the outline for our study this morning. The Bible reveals God's glory in two ways. Number one, as God's intrinsic reality.

God is glorious. And number two, as the external manifestation of God's glory.

So his glory expressed in the world. Number one is God's intrinsic reality. And number two, as the external manifestation of God's glory.

So number one, God's glory expressed as God's intrinsic reality. In the Old Testament, the primary Hebrew word for glory, which is pronounced, I believe, kabod, meant a heavy weight.

Such as a rich man's possessions, which, when weighed, added up to a great deal of weight. The richer he was, the more his possessions would weigh.

[10 : 17] With this wealth came a degree of clout, or a heavy influence upon others in the community. Thus, glory came to represent the greatness of a man, which commanded the respect of others.

So not just how well a man would be known, not famous like people are famous in our day, and then they try to have influence on people, right? But famous for being famous in some respects. But this is a fame that has influence. God's weight, or glory, is the greatness of who he is.

His glory is the awesome gravity of his name. I am who I am. The infinite wealth of his divine attributes, as is found in his holiness, his sovereignty, his wrath, his justice, his grace, his goodness, and so on.

Every aspect of his character is immeasurably heavy, weighty, incomparably great, beyond any human's character, or ability.

[11 : 34] Being absolutely perfect, God is awesome in every way. Steve Lawson, who's a contemporary pastor, told the following account in an article concerning the intrinsic reality of God's glory.

He wrote this. Years ago, Donald Gray Barnhouse, pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, delivered a message that aired on CBC radio.

In this national address, the noted Bible teacher speculated about what would be the most diabolical strategy that Satan could employ against the church in the years to come. You catch that?

He said, this is what I think would be most diabolical that Satan could do as a strategy against the church. To the astonishment of many listeners, Barnhouse imagined that all of the bars in Philadelphia would be closed.

Prostitutes would no longer walk the streets. pornography would no longer be available. The streets would be clean and all the city neighborhoods would be filled with law-abiding citizens. All swearing and cursing would be gone.

[12 : 42] Children would respectfully say, yes, sir, and no, ma'am. Every church in town, Barnhouse added, would be packed to overflowing. There would not be one church pew that could not contain one more citizen.

What, you ask, could be wrong with this? Barnhouse then delivered the knockout punch. The deadliest, most diabolical danger, he said, would be that in each of these filled-to-capacity sanctuaries, Jesus Christ would never be preached and the glory of God would never be exalted. And beloved, this is all too true in many of our churches today. I have actually found myself in these past five weeks feeling a heaviness about the state of American Christianity.

the degree to which the heirs of Rome have slipped into our evangelical churches. The magnitude of a soft prosperity gospel.

Many call it moralistic, therapeutic deism, which goes something like this, and you can pick this up in so many sermons today. Do good so that you'll feel good so that you'll get good.

[14 : 07] Next Sunday, we're going to I hesitate on the word celebrate. We're going to gather together and consider the persecuted church as it's the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church.

Try to preach that garbage at some places in the world. Some of our pastors today, great theologians, well-studied, doctors of theology, would be shut down by the simple faith of suffering Christians.

around the world. That they would say to them, oh, but to be like Christ. This past week, a church called First Baptist Dallas, pastored by a man named Robert Jeffers, Dr. Robert Jeffers, a church that is part of our denomination, invited Sean Hannity to come and be interviewed as part of the preaching.

This is last week. Because he is the executive producer of a film, a faith-based film, Sean Hannity has, for a long time, espoused himself as a Roman Catholic.

So he sits on the stage talking to Dr. Jeffers and proceeds to talk about how he's not sure if he really considers himself a Catholic any longer, but more a, and I quote, born-again Christian.

[15 : 35] And then he goes on to talk about how the ill feelings he would have as a young man after partying all night, he'd wake up feeling horrible. He thought was God working and speaking in his conscience.

And so he stopped doing those things. He stopped partying. He started hanging out with other people. He stopped working in the restaurant industry. He started working in the construction industry instead. And he finds that if he just will listen to this conscience God telling him, helping him to do good things, that he feels good.

You're hearing do good and the feel good in there. And at the conclusion of this, Dr. Robert Jeffers says to him, brother, I am so glad that I'm going to see you in heaven one day.

Trampled the gospel of Jesus Christ. Justification by, through grace, by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ. Alone. A horrible travesty.

And I hope you feel that. I hope that you don't go, I don't really understand what's bad about that. Sean Hannity said, I'm earning my way to heaven. And a Southern Baptist pastor, a well-known, outspoken, published Southern Baptist pastor said, yeah, you sure are.

[16:59] Dr. Jeffers helped damn Sean Hannity this past Sunday did not speak clearly to him the gospel of Jesus Christ and they were applauded.

It makes me tremble. I'm so afraid for American Christianity. God's glory may have already left our churches.

He may have already moved on places like China where it's reported that 10,000 people come to faith every day. He may have already left us to this diabolical strategy of Satan.

let this not be true of us. Despite all of this, despite the troubling state of American Christianity, God is glorious.

He is intrinsically glorious. Nothing that we feel, think, say, or do will add to or subtract from God's intrinsic glory.

[18:07] King David declares in Psalm 138, verse 5, great is the glory of the Lord. In Ephesians 3, 16, the Apostle Paul asks that the Ephesian believers be strengthened with power according to the riches of God's glory.

In Isaiah 42, 8, God says, I am the Lord, that is my name, my glory, I give to no other.

So God is himself glorious. And not only that, but we see in Isaiah 42, 8, that he is a glory miser.

And this is good for us because we are glory thieves.

We love to have glory for our self, to be made famous, to have influence for us. We're always wanting to make more of ourselves than we ought to, and in so doing, make little of God.

God is weighty, whether or not we want him to be, and so God is right in being zealous for his own fame.

[19:23] Beloved, it is so good for us that God is God-centered, that God is a miser of his own glory because he is God. God. It would always be wrong for any one of us to try to heap up glory for ourselves because we are not God.

But God himself, the Lord, the great I am, the self-existent one, the intrinsically glorious one, would do us no favor allowing us to have glory for ourselves.

He does us infinite favor in showing us how glorious he is, pointing to himself all the time and in so many ways.

Look at me, the glorious one. And that we get this right is so important. That in our thinking and therefore in our living, God is huge and we are but tiny.

God is glorious and we are humble. It's a massive importance. A.W. Tozer said, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

[20:39] So, is God glorious in your mind? Is his holiness, his separateness from us massive to you? Is it humbling to consider God?

If not, I would suggest to you that you do not know the God of the Bible. Get into the Scripture and read about this glorious God. But also, we come to the second way that the glory of God is revealed as the external manifestation of God's glory.

So we have his glory in the Scripture. We can behold his intrinsic glory in the Bible. But also, in the Bible, we're taught other ways in which and ways in which we read it in the Scripture, the external manifestation of God's glory.

And I have four ways in which he manifests his glory externally. Number one, God has manifested and is manifesting his glory in his creation.

So we look around us. The beauty, I'm glad to do this in October because things are really beautiful right now. Are they not? We live in a beautiful place. It gets ignited with beauty for a couple of weeks in October.

[21:58] I'm told you should drive north this week, not too far, and the leaves are just an astounding color right now. Beholding the manifest glory of God comes in so many ways in his creation.

The psalmist says in Psalm 19, 1-4, the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaim his handiwork. Day to day it pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge.

There is no speech, there are their words whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. So we behold the manifest glory of God in creation and standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon on the north rim watching the sun rise, in catching a brook trout in a North Georgia stream, in skein, heavy, powdery drift.

We see the glory of God and the beauty of his creation. Psalm 104 verse 24 and 25 and then verse 31, psalmist says, O Lord, how manifold are your works.

in wisdom have you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great.

[23 : 31] May the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in his works. Paul writes in Romans chapter 1 verse 20, of God for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

God has manifested and is manifesting his glory in his creation. And beloved, we do well when we enjoy these types of things, but when we begin to worship the things themselves, we become idolaters.

sometimes our worship doesn't go quite high enough. It needs to go above and beyond the God who made these things. This feels a bit like an obligatory plug, but maybe once a year I need to say something about football because I hear that's what pastors do.

Yesterday, for UGA fans, it was a pretty big deal that UGA beat the Florida Gators. I had to rehearse that line in my head, just so you know.

I looked it up this morning for your benefit. We don't do well when we stop at worshipping UGA football, but we do well when we enjoy UGA football and the God who created the incredible athleticism of these people.

[25 : 04] We're created as people who worship. We are drawn to look at magnificent things, amazing feats. It happens naturally.

There's an impulse in all of us to do that. It channels in all kinds of ways, but every bit of it ought to be aimed at the glory of God. God made all things.

Those things that are admirable are to pull our minds to Him. So God has manifested and is manifesting His glory in His creation. More particularly, number two, God has manifested and is manifesting His glory in the person of Jesus Christ.

God Himself condescended to become a man. Came as a baby in a manger, so humble, the son of a carpenter in a little town called Nazareth.

Colossians 1, 15-18. Paul says this of this Jesus, Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[26 : 21] For by Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him and for Him.

And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church, He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. Now you need to hear that closing phrase, not that He possibly could be first, but that He will be first, supreme, exalted, glorified.

Hebrews 1, 3, the writer of Hebrews says, Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.

So God has manifested and is manifesting His glory in the very person of Jesus Christ. And so when we see Jesus, we see the glory of God.

[27 : 36] Thirdly, God has manifested and is manifesting His glory in the work of Jesus Christ, namely the salvation of His people. So this Jesus who came and lived a perfect life on our behalf, that we might fulfill the righteous requirement of the law, we would have His righteousness imputed, given to us, who died a sinner's death, the greatest tragedy of all history, that He was punished for us in our stead.

He bore the wrath of God on our behalf, was buried three days later, raised again, that by grace through faith in His person and work, we can be saved.

God has manifested and is manifesting His glory in this. Just listen to some of what Scripture says concerning it. Psalm 96, 2-4, Sing to the Lord, bless His name, tell of His salvation from day to day, declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples, for great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.

He is to be feared above all gods. Or Isaiah 43, 6-7, God says, I will say to the north, give up, and to the south, do not withhold.

Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

[29 : 14] Or Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3, and following, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

In love, He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will. And then verse 6, so all of this working together, God working, verse 6, to the praise of His glorious grace.

Paul again, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 6, For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. If we have beheld Him in His person and His work, we have seen the glory of God and it is now given to us to help others see the glory of God.

Spurgeon quote of the week, it would seem, that's on the front of your bulletin, he said this, we endeavor to glorify Him now by our actions, but then He will be glorified in our own persons, in the fact that we are redeemed ones of God, He will be glorified, and character and condition.

[30 : 52] He is glorified by what we do, but He is at the last to be glorified in what we are, because He made us.

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Regeneration preceded our faith, I would contend, and so all praise is due, to Christ.

Fourthly, and lastly, God has manifested, and is manifesting His glory in the work of His church. So having been saved by Christ, now being empowered by His Spirit, we are about the work of bringing honor and glory to God.

And do you see the two ways that it's taught in the Scripture? God is Himself glorious, we can't add to that glory, but we can show Him more as He is.

John Piper has this great little analogy. He talks about magnifying God being the same as glorifying God. He talks about how there's two types of magnification. The type of magnification that a microscope does makes very tiny things look bigger than they really are.

[32 : 08] Sometimes people think in this way wrongly about glorifying God. God is not a tiny thing who needs your help to be made look bigger. But there's also the type of magnification that a telescope does where it makes a massive thing, a weighty thing, a glorious thing look more like it actually is.

So in that way, we bring honor, we bring glory, we glorify God by being reflections of who He is. And you see how this is more glory building for God, right?

Because we have no way of saying, look at me and how great I am in following God, but look how great God is as I follow Him. It's a humble posture that brings glory to God.

In 1646 and 1647, a group of divines met together at a synod at Westminster to help bring the Church of England into greater conformity with the Church of Scotland.

And they wrote a number of documents. We know them as the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the Westminster Larger Catechism. Maybe well known to you, the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is this.

[33 : 25] What is the chief end of man? And the answer that they wrote is man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

And I like Piper's alteration on that. I think it's correct. I think this is what they meant. Man's chief end is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.

And just to your benefit, I don't know if you're aware or not of the Westminster larger catechism. Very few of us pay much attention to it. Question one is a bit different and the answer is a bit different.

And I just think it's good. It's a little expanded. Question one is what is the chief and highest end of man? So not only the primary but the best end of man. And the answer is man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever.

And so we're meant to be about this work. This is the chief high end. Jesus said in Matthew 5.16 Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your

Father who is in heaven.

[34 : 42] My father has this wonderful analogy that I have used rather widely and so if you've heard it before my apology to you. He uses it and I have used it most specifically about church leaders but today I want to expand a little bit to all of us all of those who claim to know Christ and to follow him and it's an analogy about a race horse versus a plow horse my dad always starts it this way he says our denomination needs more plow horses and fewer race horses and he goes on to explain that race horses get a lot of applause right they do something that's not extremely meaningful running around a track but we all praise the race horse we want to see the race horse run fast right and crowds gather to make see this happen and applaud them on the plow horse doesn't really get applauded by anybody right the plow horse gets hooked up to a plow and it puts its head down and it draws a long straight line and at the end of that row it gets turned around and it puts its head down and it does it again long straight line and the only people that possibly praise the plow horse are the family for whom he helps provide food and that plow horse lives a long faithful life to that family and one day passes on we need more plow horses

I would suggest that the Christian is meant to be a plow horse humbly! serving! loving! Putting our heads down! And simply doing the next right thing quietly lives lived to the glory of God teaching the truth propagating it everywhere we go if we would have more plow horses Ephesians 2.10 Paul says for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them so whatever it is that you do in your life you can be sure if you are a Christian you are meant to glorify God in it you work to the glory of God you study to the glory of God you sing music to the glory of God you cut your lawn to the glory of God Martin Luther famously said a milkmaid can milk cows to the glory of

God and glory of God and thinking about Soli Deo Gloria it's hard for me not to consider Johann Sebastian Bach if you don't know who he is shame on you you need to listen to classical music he was a late 17th early 18th century German composer his music is just fantastic and you may not know that he signed all of his work Soli Deo Gloria you find it on his original pieces written somewhere on there and then later in his life he simply signed things S D G and if you received an email from me you may have noticed a lower case S an uppercase D and a lower case G and sometimes my name in lower case as well Soli Deo Gloria Johann Sebastian Bach and all of his talent wanted people to be drawn to the God who gave him the talent he recognized that he could compose music to the glory of God and so right doctrine leads us to this a greater magnification of God we do not want to make much of ourselves we want to make much of him because he is worthy of being made much of if you work to make much of yourself you will find yourself a liar if you work to make much of

God he will never fail in his intrinsic gloriousness so the Bible is our final authority and teaches us that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and all things are for the glory of God alone I said I'd read it again and I will Romans chapter 11 verse 33 and following I hope it has a little more meaning for you now oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever amen please join me in prayer thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you