

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Five Questions for Five Solas

JESSE JOHNSON



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The gospel preached by the Apostles and attested to by the resurrection was so clear and compelling that the first years of the church were marked by rapid growth. It seemed that the church really would turn the world upside down. However, through the incursion of error, the politicization of the church, and the mysticism of the Catholic magisterium, by the middle ages a cloud of darkness settled over the truths of the New Testament.

By the 1100s, people in Europe could no longer read the Scriptures; there were few (if any) gospel teaching churches, and it appeared that the darkness of man-made religion had permanently eclipsed the truth of the gospel. People who were asking, “What must I do to be saved?” were largely unable to find an answer, instead clinging to relics and superstition. They were left, like the nations before Christ had come, “groping about in the darkness, looking for light.”

Amid a series of events, though, by the mid 1500’s the gospel would be ‘rediscovered’—much like Columbus ‘rediscovered’ the Americas. This revelation began with Huss and continued with Luther, Tyndale, Lady Jane Grey, Calvin, Knox, and many others. By the end of the sixteenth century, it was clear that the darkness was lifted, and the light of the gospel was beginning to break through in the Western world.

What happened during this Reformation period can be best understood through *The Five Solas*, which today we will approach through the lens of five questions. The first of these questions, which is the spark that ignited the fire of truth – is *what must I do to be saved?*

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The answer of man-made religion to this question is always *good works, good citizenry, and a hope that God will just recognize good people*. To the errors of this darkness, the reformers answered the query in a different way: *Sola Gratia* – salvation comes by grace alone. There is nothing a person can do to merit salvation. It is entirely of grace.

While ‘grace alone’ was a motto of the Reformation, it is an old truth that had roots long before Luther. Augustine once wrote, “The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord must be understood as that by which alone men are delivered from evil, and without which they do absolutely no good thing, whether in thought, or will and affection, or in deed.” Because of depravity, our wills are in bondage to sin. As [Ephesians 2:1](#) explains, we “are slaves to sin.” Jesus said that we “love the darkness and not the light.”

Luther said it this way: “Fallen humanity lacks the ability to make spiritual decisions or accomplish righteous acts. Free will without grace is makes the person the permanent prisoner of evil.” The only way a sinner can be saved is if God chooses to do so, and praise be to the Lord that we worship a God who does, in fact, save sinners – as Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 1:30](#): “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus.”

Grace is not a commodity, but an attribute of God. Grace cannot be traded, bought, sold, or earned. Grace can only be freely given by God, who gives us His Son.

This leads to the second question: *How must I respond?*

If salvation is given by God, according to His will, then how do we respond and what must we do, considering the gracious act of the Lord? The answer is *Sola Fide* – faith alone. The only proper response to God’s grace is faith.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen. It is what unites Jews and Gentiles in the church and what makes the believer a child of Abraham. Faith is what gives us the ability and willingness to love Christ and to follow Him, counting the things of this world rubbish. By faith, we call the false religions of the world error, abandon trust in human works for salvation, and cast all our hope on Christ. This is not a natural faith, but a *contra mundum*, against-the-world, universe-tilting, Holy Spirit-given gift from God.

Here we get to the central element of salvation: being justified by God and being declared righteous. Where God takes our sins and gives them to Christ, and then through grace saves us, we respond only by faith. God does not do ninety percent of the work, and we provide the other ten percent. Nor does God, through grace, energize our lives to be pleasing to Him. Instead, “We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

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John Calvin said that this was the most important doctrine of the Reformation, writing, “*Sola fide* is the first and keenest subject of this controversy.” On the other hand, the Catholic Church responded to the Reformation by declaring: “If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification...let him be anathema.”

In contrast to Catholicism, the apostle Paul told Peter, “Man is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith.” Justification is getting our sins forgiven based on God’s grace expressed through faith, alone.

So, how does a person get right with God? We answer that we are justified by faith, apart from works, alone.

The next question we find is *in whom do we put our faith for salvation?*

The answer is *Solus Christus* – In Christ alone.

Other religions may place their faith in Christ, but they don’t put their faith in Christ *alone*. They might put their faith in Christ, and then also in the act of Christ to use his grace to energize the sinner to do works that then make the substance of our faith meritorious. Why not say, what so many believe, that grace simply energizes us, that faith makes our works acceptable, and that Jesus is one of many mediators? Because this is not faith in Christ alone, but faith in Christ plus works. Thus Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, said, “Our only comforter, redeemer, savior, and mediator with God is Jesus Christ, through whom alone we obtain grace, help and salvation.”

Jesus had many names but has only one mission, and that is to be the only savior of the world, which He did by becoming a man. For that reason, He is our only substitute. We are not saved by the blood of bulls and goats, but by the sacrifice of the Son of God in our place.

The testimony of Scripture on this truth is unassailable. [Colossians 2:13](#) says, “Because of Christ, God has forgiven us all our transgressions.” There are no other means or method or mediator to salvation. There is only Christ alone.

At this point, the message in God’s Word is undeniably clear. We are saved by Grace, through faith in Christ alone. This leads to the next question: *on what authority do we believe this?*

The answer is *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture alone is our final authority.

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The world is filled with those offering their ideas about salvation and God, but their thoughts and opinions do not matter if contrary to the Word of God. At his trial, Luther was asked if he understood that his teachings contradicted the plain teaching of the Church. He said in reply: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason...I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”

This is in stark contrast to the Catholic Church, which makes an appeal to the Church as a separate stream of authority. It teaches that Scripture is authoritative, to be sure, but there is another stream of authority flowing from God, namely the unbroken line of papal succession and institutional authority manifest in the Church.

But this is scripture *plus*. It is an appeal to God through the Word mingled with the church, and is contrary to the reformation understanding of authority. There is no other authority other than scripture on which we can build our lives, or that can rule our worship. The frontlines of the battle between light and darkness is a battle over authority. We say that the Bible alone has inherent authority. As such, we reject the perpetual virginity of Mary, the necessity of sacraments for salvation, the existence of purgatory, and the notion that the Pope has any authority over the church. We do so because we believe in Scripture alone as our binding authority.

So, *what is the goal of all this?* There are two answers.

First, peoples’ souls are at stakes.

If men and women get these truths wrong, they get the gospel wrong, relying on others who cannot save for salvation.

Second, there is a basic truth that all things in this world work for the glory of God, not the glory of man, which is the final sola – *Soli Deo Gloria*.

This truth is captured by [Romans 11:36](#): “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, Amen.” This is the truth that is under the surface of all the others – the issue of the centrality and supremacy of God’s glory.

Nothing reveals God’s glory to the degree that the gospel does. When we sin, we fall short of the glory of God, who acts “for the praise of His glory,” as [Ephesians 1:16](#) states. God sent Jesus, who is the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature,” according to [Colossians 1:15](#). By dying on the cross and rising from the dead, Jesus reveals that He Himself is the Lord of glory.

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Thus, in the gospel message all things work toward the glory of God. This is why the Scripture says that God is the Lord of glory, and “I will not share My glory with another.” God does not design salvation to give glory to diffuse his glory but to magnify it. God designs His glory so that He is the beginning, the middle, and the end. God is the source, the means, and the object of glory. As Paul says, it is all from Him, to Him, and through Him.

To God be the glory.

Happy Reformation Day



Jesse Johnson

Jesse is the Teaching Pastor at Immanuel Bible Church in Springfield, VA. He also leads The Master’s Seminary Washington DC location.

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