

The Protestant Reformation

So, if we go back to the year 1500, the Church (what we now call the Roman Catholic Church) was very powerful (politically and spiritually) in Western Europe. The Catholic Church was an institution plagued by internal power struggles. Popes and Cardinals often lived more like kings than spiritual leaders. Popes claimed political as well as spiritual power. They commanded armies, made political alliances and enemies, and, sometimes, even waged war. Clearly, if the Pope was concentrating on these worldly issues, there wasn't as much time left for caring for the souls of the faithful.

The corruption of the Catholic Church was well known, and several attempts had been made to reform the Church (notably by John Wycliffe and Jan Hus), but none of these efforts successfully challenged Church practice until Martin Luther's actions in the early 1500s.

Martin Luther was a German monk and Professor of Theology at the University of Wittenberg. Luther sparked the Reformation in 1517 by posting his "95 Theses" on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany - these theses were a list of statements that expressed Luther's concerns about certain Church practices - largely the sale of indulgences, but they were based on Luther's deeper concerns with Church doctrine. The sale of indulgences was a practice where the Church acknowledged a donation or other charitable work with a piece of paper (an indulgence), that certified that your soul would enter heaven more quickly by reducing your time in Purgatory. If you committed no serious sins that guaranteed your place in Hell, and you died before repenting and atoning for all of your sins, then your soul went to Purgatory - a kind of way-station where you finished atoning for your sins before being allowed to enter Heaven.

Luther was gravely concerned about the way in which getting into Heaven was connected with a financial transaction. But the sale of indulgences was not Luther's only disagreement with the institution of the Roman Catholic Church.

Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)

The Bible is our ultimate authority for understanding God, salvation, and how we are to live our lives. All matters of theology and doctrine are to find their source in Scripture, as it is God's inerrant Word and is all-sufficient for teaching and correction (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"Scripture is therefore the perfect and only standard of spiritual truth, revealing infallibly all that we must believe in order to be saved and all that we must do in order to glorify God. That—no more, no less—is what sola Scriptura means." – John MacArthur

Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)

Salvation cannot be obtained through human effort (Ephesians 1:7). It is only by the unmerited grace of God that we have a means of forgiveness and justification to restore our relationship with Him.

"Truly, then, we are saved by grace alone, without works or other merit." – Martin Luther

Sola Fide (Faith Alone)

Coupled with the previous *sola*, we hold that justification is an act of God's grace which can only be received through faith. No good work or deed on our part will allow us to earn this gift, but instead we put our faith in Christ as our only means of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The distinctive of the reformation seen in *Sola Fide* is that the instrument of receiving God's grace is faith, not faith *and* works. Faith alone is, of course, in reference to our *justification*, or being made right with God. The believer's *sanctification* is a process of becoming more Christ like, where our good works spring forth from our faith.

Solus Christus (Christ Alone)

God is gracious, but He is also holy and just. In order for sinners to be justified, these sins must be accounted for. This was accomplished through the sinless life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. The atoning death of Christ is the only means by which we can obtain the forgiveness of our sins (John 14:6; Acts 4:11-12).

Soli Deo Gloria (Glory of God Alone)

All things, including the justification of sinners and the lives of believers, are created for the purpose of bringing glory to God (Revelation 4:11). This is beautifully stated in the Westminster Catechism, *"Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."*