

Soli Deo Gloria: To the Glory of God Alone



Romans 11:33-36

Justin Deeter – October 29, 2017

Today we finish our series on the five sola's of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 2017, it will be 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the church of Wittenberg. Thus began a Gospel revolution. The reformation is our own family history, and we've gone through the five sola's of the Reformation to help us understand the key truths that emerged out of the Reformation. These five truths are still something we need to hold on to today.

First, we learned *sola scriptura*, that Scripture alone is the final authority for the church. Scripture defines the Gospel and and directs the church. When Scripture and church tradition are in conflict, Scripture wins out. It's the final source of authority.

Second, we learned *sola fide*, that we are saved by faith alone. As the Reformers grasped the authority of God's word alone, they discovered that the Bible teaches us that we are saved by faith alone. We are justified before God not through our works or actions, but by simply believing upon Jesus Christ.

Third, we learned *sola gratia*, that we are saved by grace alone. God is the one who sovereignly brings us salvation upon the cross of Christ and applies that grace to our lives. There is no human cooperation in order to receive grace, rather grace flows into our lives by the sovereign will of God.

Fourth, we learned *solus Christus*, that Christ alone wins that grace for us, and that it is only by faith in him that we receive the blessing of salvation. Because we are cloaked in Christ's righteousness, not our own, we are accepted before God.

Finally, today we will learn *solī deo gloria*, to the glory of God alone. This is indeed the final and the most significant of the five solas, that everything is for the glory of God.

As we think about the phrase *solī deo gloria*, we will read from Romans 11:33-36

"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." (Romans 11:33-36, ESV)

This section from Romans 11 closes out the first half of the book of Romans in a word of doxology and praise to God. Over the last eleven chapters, Paul has unpacked the Gospel for us, most recently thinking through the mystery of God's election and his sovereign purpose in our salvation. As Paul walks us through the profound and incomprehensible mind of God, he is left with only one response—praise! As we consider this passage today, we will set our focus on verse 36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

As Christians we must affirm that everything exists for the glory of God. Like Paul, we must join in declaring "To him be glory forever. Amen." However, what does it mean for God to be glorious? Why does the whole cosmos exist to the glory of God alone? How do we define his glory?

Better yet, how does God make himself glorious? What increases God's glory? How do we make God glorious? How can I live my life for the glory of God alone? These are big questions, questions that are weighty, serious, and important. I want to help us think through these types of questions as we consider how

everything is for the glory of God alone, however for we will boil them down into three questions: *first*, what is God's glory? *Second*, how does the Gospel bring God glory? *Third*, how Can You Live Your Life for God's Glory?

1. What is God's Glory?

If God's glory is the aim of the universe, the purpose for which God created the world, what is God's glory? It's a term we use frequently but often have no idea what it means. At our house with our three young kids, it's fun to watch their vocabulary expand. They listen to how mommy and daddy talk, and every now in then they will throw out a big three or four syllable word. They are not really sure what it means, and they think that they are using it right. I think we do the same type of thing with a word like "glory." We hear it used all the time at church, but nobody really knows what we mean by it. So, I'm going to attempt to define the term as we think about God's glory:

God's glory is the public expression of his intrinsic worth which radiates the beautiful communion of holy love from God's own being.

God's glory is not something distinct from God, but rather radiates from God, as a beam of light from the sun. Beams originate from the sun but spread out from the source, illuminating our world. So it is with God's glory. Within God exists perfect beauty and love. God does not lack fulfillment or fellowship, but rather possess fellowship within his triune existence—as Father, Son, and Spirit. Each person in the God-head exalts and delights in the other. God has always existed as a community of love and holiness. As we think about all that God has done in Christ, we must understand that he doesn't create us because he needs us, as if he needs our companionship. He doesn't create the universe because he's bored or in need. Rather, the universe is created through the overflow of his love, bubbling over out of his own holy existence. As the Father, Son, and Spirit delight in one another as a beautiful community, the overflow of God's glory runs over manifesting itself in the creative energy of God. God creates his universe as a theater to showcase his own glory. Within this theater, God will direct the drama of redemption in order to display the fulness of his character and attributes. It is through the cosmos that God's intrinsic worth goes public, radiating his beauty, love, and fellowship through the grand drama of redemption.

So, God's glory emanates from God to his creation, particularly his image bearers, human beings. As God's image bearers, we are like little mirrors meant to reflect back to God his own image. In our sin, our ability to reflect God's image is shattered. However, as Christ comes to redeem and save, he restores us again. In Christ, as we behold the glory of God, we reflect back to God his own glory. So that the glory that goes forth from God, returns back to God as he redeems us to worship him.

Jonathan Edwards put it this way,

All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God. . . . The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God, and God is the beginning, middle and end in this affair.¹

Put as simply as possible, as God shines forth his glory upon us, we return his glory to him in worship. This is what Paul means when he writes, "For from him and through him and to him are all things." All things come from God, through God, and are purposed to God. God's glory is the goal of the universe, it's the purpose of our existence.

So now that we've tried to define God's glory and have described how it is the ultimate purpose of the universe, we now ask a second question: how does God's sovereign plan of redemption bring God glory?

¹<http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy43OjU6Mzo2OjExLndqZW8uMTcyMzY0NS4xNzIzNjQ5LjE3MjM2NjAuMTcyMzY2Ny4xNzIzNjcyLjE3MjM2NzYuMTcyMzY4MS4xNzIzNjg1>

2. How Does the Gospel Bring God Glory?

This is the question that propels Paul to dwell on the gospel and the doctrine of election, which drives him to write this great doxology before us. Throughout the book of Romans, Paul has taught us the universal sinfulness of humanity, and the good news that God justifies us by faith. Through faith in Christ, we are given assurance of salvation and hope. In Romans 10, he discusses the doctrine of election and in chapter 11 he discusses the nature of the church's relationship to Israel. However, all of this culminates in worship, praise to the living God! The Gospel brings great benefit to us, but its ultimate aim is the glory of God! Through the Gospel we receive the love of God, redemption, and everlasting life. Yet, God's ultimate aim in the Gospel is to bring glory to himself. But, how does God's sovereign plan of redemption bring himself glory? How does the Gospel bring God glory?

First, the Gospel Glorifies God By Displaying God's Love

God is abounding in love for sinners. We are poor, need, and broken in our sin. We are filthy beggars without a penny to our names. All we have to offer God are our filthy rags of rambunctious righteousness. Yet, even though we have nothing to offer God, and how we are rebellious creatures against him, he chooses to love us. Filled with great compassion for sinners like you and me, God orchestrates history to redeem some. He sends Jesus into the world to be our righteousness and to pay our sin. As he goes to the cross, we see God's put on display for sinners!

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31–32, ESV)

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4–7, ESV)

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9–10, ESV)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, ESV)

God has chosen to display his great love by pouring out that love on the most unlikely of subjects, you and me. In Christ, the love of God is fully known, and those who come to Christ by faith receive and participate in this sweet love.

Second, the Gospel Glorifies God by Displaying God’s Holiness

The Gospel also showcases God’s own holiness. Throughout the Bible, God is declared as holy, set apart, and distinct. He is morally perfect in every way, splendid and without fault of any kind. Nothing has defiled the Lord in the purity of his glory. He defends his holiness with great zeal, punishing the evil doer and casting out of his presence those who do not belong. That includes me and you in our sin.

So, the Gospel exhibits God’s own holiness. It tells us the extent of his love but also the extent of his holiness. In order to love us, God had to make us clean. The penalty of our sin required payment. Enter the cross. Jesus doesn’t endure the sufferings for the cross for no reason—rather he ascends to the cross as the sin bearer, the passover lamb to atone for the sins of humanity. Upon the cross,

Jesus absorbed the full weight of God's wrath, absorbing every ounce of his holy justice in your place. At the same time, God was taking the righteousness of his son and applying it to the account of those who put their faith in Jesus.

God has always desired that his people be holy as he is holy (Lev 11:45). Israel so often failed to live up to this command, but in the New Covenant age, God has inscribed the law upon the hearts of his people. As they are born again, they are given hearts that delight in the holiness. As Christians, God has reshaped our tastes and refashioned our desires. We now long for the holy things of God; they are sweet and refreshing to us. Not only that, but God has given his Spirit to every believer to sanctify them. The Spirit convicts us of our sin, and applies the word of truth to our hearts. Like impure metal, the fire of God's Spirit refines us, shapes us, and prepares us for heaven. Over the years, the Christian should be increasingly like their God, growing in holiness and godliness.

As Paul instructs us in Colossians,

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” (Colossians 3:12–13, ESV)

Third, the Gospel Glorifies God by Displaying God's Wisdom

The Gospel also glorifies God by displaying his wisdom. Who could have come up with such a glorious plan of redemption? God's work of redemption wasn't a back up plan after the failures of Israel. Israel wasn't a back up plan after the failures of Noah. Noah wasn't a back up plan after the failures of Adam and Eve in the garden. Rather, the Scriptures state that Jesus was always the plan from the beginning. Before the earth was even founded by God he planned to bring himself glory through the redemption of sinful human beings by his only begotten son. Before the theater was constructed, the playwright had the script in his hands.

“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.” (Ephesians 1:3–4, ESV)

The Gospel reveals and showcases the glory of God. It displays his perfect love poured on unlikely and undeserved sinners. It displays his perfect holiness, as he makes those sinners clean and sets them on the path of holiness. It displays the wisdom of God, who before the earth was founded put for the plan of redemption. Then, God by his sovereign power implements that plan and brings everything to pass.

The universe exists as the theater for God’s glory. God has orchestrated human history to bring glory to himself through his plan of redemption. This plan, this Gospel, showcases the totality of God’s perfect attributes. All of it is, is for the glory of God alone!

3. How Can You Live Your Life for God’s Glory?

So if everything exists for God’s glory, and the Gospel is ultimately about God’s glory, then that means that you and I exist for God’s glory alone.” You are not your own, for you were bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:19–20).

As we discussed earlier, God’s glory shines on us and we are meant to reflect that glory back to God. Through the Gospel, we are brought near to God in fellowship with him as we are united with Christ. As we are united with Christ, we become participants in the divine life with God. Through experiencing the delight of our triune God, we bring God glory through our lives. Only when we live our life in and through Christ do we achieve our ultimate purpose of bringing God glory.

As C. S. Lewis said,

*We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receipt it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.*²

How do we participate in this beauty? How do we live out our union with Christ to further bring glory to God? Let me give you three ways.

First, press into your union with Christ with spiritual intensity.

By this, I mean set your hearts affections and desires upon Christ. Take Bible reading and prayer seriously, not as some sort of rote obligation to fulfill, but as a conduit to receiving more of God. As your knowledge of God increases, you will experience more of his power. When your heart becomes increasingly captivated by the beauty of Jesus, the Spirit brings you into the sweet ecstasies of communion with the living God. Pursue the Lord with a singular intensity, as your one and only treasure. When you do that, worship will emerge as the inevitable result, as God transforms you increasingly into his own image.

Second, do the work of an evangelist and spread the Gospel.

A Christian, who lives their life for God's glory, must share the good news of Jesus with others. As the gospel is carried forth through our lives in word and action, the glory of God spreads. Every Christian is given the great commission, to go and make disciples of all nations. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ Jesus. As the fame of God's name travels around the globe through the tongues of faithful Christians, the world will be filled with worshipers of God. God's glory will increase! The primary motive behind all our evangelistic efforts must be for the fame of God's name.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 43.

Third, cultivate the earth through your vocation bringing glory to God in your work.

The Christian works with the glory of God as his or her aim. No matter your vocation, the Christian is never just doing a job for a pay check. Rather, we should work hard and strive for excellence in all that we do, to the praise of the Lord. There is a great need today for Christians to see all of their life, including their professional life, as one lived out in worship to God. We need Christians to fill every type of job and bring the Gospel to bear on their careers, from meteorologists to music teachers, from nurses to child care workers, from lawyers to film makers. We need more Christians, filled with zeal for the glory of God, to enter into every sphere of society and bring the Gospel to bear upon their industry.

Final Thoughts

May we all here today commit ourselves to living for God's glory alone. May God alone be praised for this wonderful work of redemption he has brought us in the gospel. Surely the Lord is good to us. As we've received God's glory, the public expression of his intrinsic worth, may we reflect back that glory to God in worship. We were made for this. It's the purpose for which we've been made.

You can't live for the glory of God, until the glory of Christ has come upon you. If you hope to live for the glory of God alone, you must first humble yourself, confess your sin, and receive Jesus' work by faith. Upon receiving God's work of grace, you will be empowered by the Spirit to live for the glory of God and in communion with him.

However, may every Christian here this morning live within this singular focus, to live our lives for the glory of God! Don't be distracted by anything else, but this singular vision for your life. We must ask ourselves this question, "How can I live my life for the glory of God alone?" If you don't know the answer, then bring it before the Lord in prayer. Question your heart and your motives to uproot any idolatrous desires that would distract from this purpose. You were made for the glory of God, redeemed for the glory of God, and justified for the glory of God. Return to God the glory he has poured out upon you in Christ Jesus in worship.

The German reformer, Martin Luther, had this to say,

*When I first took upon me the defense of the Gospel, I remember a worthy man saying to me, "I like it, this doctrine you preach, because it gives glory and everything else to God alone, and nothing to man, for we cannot attribute too much glory, goodness, mercy, and so on to God." This greatly comforted and confirmed me. And it is true that the doctrine of the Gospel removes from mankind all glory, wisdom, righteousness, and so on and gives it solely to the Creator, who made everything out of nothing.*³

As we close out this series on these five sola's of the Protestant Reformation, may we never forget this last one—soli deo gloria. Live your life for the glory of God alone.

³ Luther, Commentary on Galatians, 1:11-12.