“The Five Solas”  
Dr. Robert Bardeen  
Ward Parkway Presbyterian Church  
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Ephesians 2:8-10
For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

For those who follow my sermon along with my manuscript, I am not using my manuscript this morning, and thus my words and phrases might be different than you can read.

My sermon is called The Five Solas, and since sola in Latin means “alone,” the title could be the Five Alone Statements of the Reformation.

The order of the Five Solas is much debated. Some are quite firm about placing Christ alone first. They argue that Christ always comes first. Some think that grace alone comes before faith alone because of our scripture lesson. Others believe give glory to God alone always has to come at the end because it’s an over-arching statement of our calling. Here’s the order that I give to the Five Solas.

**Scripture Alone**  
**Grace Alone**  
**Faith Alone**  
**Christ Alone**  
**Give Glory to God Alone**

In 1972, we moved to Deep River, Iowa, to serve our first church out of seminary. They had a manse which was great for us since we didn’t have any money to buy a house. It was an old house. Part of the basement was dirt, and there we found some frogs and a few snakes.

One night, while reading in the living room, we heard a noise in the kitchen. I left my chair and entered the kitchen several times, but when I did, the noise stopped. We searched everywhere in the kitchen, and finally in the cabinet drawer next to the back door, we found little pieces of aluminum. A mouse was in the house!
I created a plan and I told Joyce, but she thought I was crazy. It all had to do with my history with the game of tennis. At the end of the sermon, I’ll tell you what I did because my plan worked perfectly.

I like the word “plan.” It means developing a detailed proposal for doing something. It means you are intention about what you are going to do. Maybe your plan is a design for a project. Some think a plan needs to be an orderly step by step process.

I don’t know about you, but I have enjoyed considering God’s plan for the exiles, and thinking about God’s plans for our church and our lives. I like the affirmation that life is not random. Things don’t come about by chance. I like that God, despite sin and evil, is in control.

So, I have a plan for my sermon. We are going to stay with this Ephesians passage the whole time. All Five Solas are revealed in this wonderful passage in Ephesians. That’s my plan for today, and I’m going to stick with it (a friend used to say to me).

Here’s the first Sola.

**Scripture Alone**
Grace Alone
Faith Alone
Christ Alone
Give Glory to God Alone

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

> 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—
> 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Please notice I have just underlined Ephesians 2:8-10. We are looking at scripture this morning. It is the basis for my message. Although I might quote scholars and theologians, they are not the foundation for my sermon. Even though I might read a poem or hymn, the content might be helpful, but it is not the center of my sermon.

Scripture is the center, and scripture was the center of the Reformation. The reformers protested against the Roman Catholic Church because of the first sola. The Catholic Church in the 1500s claimed that tradition and papal edict had equal authority with scripture. The reformers said, “No, scripture is the only source for truth and guidance.”
Martin Luther protested against the selling of indulgences (like hall passes), clerical abuses, and doctrines about salvation in the Catholic Church that were not based on scripture. In 1517, 501 years ago, Luther pounded his 95 protests on the Wittenberg door, hoping for discussion and debate and correction. Instead, he was excommunicated and removed from the pastoral office. He was condemned as an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor, the Pope. The authority of scripture was at the center of Luther’s protest.

In 1987, we were in France visiting the parents of the international student, Olivia, who we hosted for a while in California. It was a wonderful time to tour and talk and discover. The father did not speak English, but his mother taught English at the high school, so we got along. On Sunday, we went to church with them. The Catholic Mass was spoken in French. Afterwards during lunch, I asked about the priest’s sermon. “Oh, I didn’t like it!” Olivia’s father replied with a rough voice. “He was just asking for more money.”

“During his sermon?” I asked. “What scripture passage was he using?” This entire dialogue was accomplished through translation.

“He used nothing from the Bible. He just wanted more money for the new home the priests – more and more priests.”

“Do you have a Bible?” I asked. Olivia nodded and ran upstairs immediately. By the time he returned, I realized the Bible would be in French as well. Olivia’s mother helped me find the book of Ephesians, chapter four, where Paul teaches about the reasons why some are called by Christ to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor and teachers. They are to equip the people for works of service, so that the whole body of Christ may be built up. “Does you priest ever teach the scriptures to build you up?”

“Never!” There was a pause for a moment because the word “never” was so strong.

“But that’s what they should be doing,” he continued. “They should be teaching me from the scriptures.”

Then I said, “You are speaking like a Protestant.” It took a few moments for him to get the translation and the meaning.

Finally, he said, “Well, yes. I am protesting. I am a Protestant!”

Here’s our next Sola!

Scripture Alone
Grace Alone  
Faith Alone  
Christ Alone  
Give Glory to God Alone  

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

God sent Christ to be our savior. That sending is called grace. God’s love in Jesus Christ is called grace. Grace is not merited and not earned. Grace is offered to you. You can accept that grace or turn away from grace. Grace is what God has done – what God has already done with Christ on the cross.

Luther protested the Catholic teaching that you can buy your way into heaven, that you can earn salvation, and that you can get a right relationship with God through your own efforts.

Grace alone!

Here’s the next Sola!

Scripture Alone  
Grace Alone  
Faith Alone  
Christ Alone  
Give Glory to God Alone  

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

But we must be cautious about the attitude we have about faith. Faith is not a work that we do. We don’t earn our way into heaven through faith.

Paul reminds us that “this is not your own doing.”

John Calvin had much to say about faith alone, and the Post-Calvinists even had more to say. I want to make two theological statements, and do so with love and kindness.
First, some say you can only have faith in Christ if God the Father gives you the ability to do so. It’s closely related to predestination. I agree that the ability to have faith in Jesus Christ is a gift from God like all abilities, but we must not deny the gift of choice. Free will has to be in balance with any statement about predestination.

Second, some contend that limited atonement is true. It’s promoted by those who affirm TULIP, a theological position that affirms: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. Those who promote limited atonement say that Christ died only for the elect, but I say there are many scripture passages that disagree. I think Christ died for everyone, for the world, and not just for those who are in relationship with Christ. TULIP theologians change John 3:16 to this statement: “For God so loved the believers....” No, I disagree. I believe God so loved the world, the whole world, and God desires for everyone to follow Jesus Christ. I believe Christ died for everyone!

Here is the fourth Sola!

**Scripture Alone**
**Grace Alone**
**Faith Alone**
**Christ Alone**
**Give Glory to God Alone**

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Paul wrote: It is the gift of God. What is the gift of God? Of course, the gift is grace, but what is the moment of grace? It’s Christ on the cross. That’s the picture of grace: God’s love shown on the cross, the total sacrifice for all time - the death of Christ.

There is no other Savior. Christ made us and Christ saved us. We have nothing to boast about. We cannot work our way into a right relationship with God through Christ. It’s Christ alone!

Finally, here’s the last Sola!

**Scripture Alone**
**Grace Alone**
**Faith Alone**
Christ Alone
Give Glory to God Alone

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

God made us. We are created for a purpose. We are made and saved for a reason. God has prepared in advance (beforehand) for our lives.

The first question of the Shorter Catechism for the Westminster Confession of Faith is this: “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is this: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

We have been created to know God through Christ. We have been created to glorify God. We have been created to enjoy God. Sola Deo Gloria! It’s God’s plan for our lives.

This is the plan I created to take care of the mouse in the manse. I played competitive tennis from the age 12 to 17, and then again as a young adult. I got out my tennis racket, but since the drawer was so close to the backdoor, I knew I couldn’t get a full swing on the mouse. I got a fly swatter instead. There wasn’t enough room to use my forehand so I decided to use my backhand instead. I thought: How can I scare the mouse? I knew that when I get scared I jump up. So I figured if I could scare the mouse, then it would jump straight up and I could swat it.

I told Joyce my plan, and she thought I was crazy, but she watched me from the other entrance into the kitchen. When I heard the noise again, I quietly walked to the drawer in my socks. The noise didn’t stop. I put my hand on the drawer knob and quickly pulled it open.

The mouse jumped straight up. I used my fly swatter backhand, and hit it the first time. I was stunned and fell to the floor. I opened the back door, picked up the mouse by its tail, and threw it outside.

My plan worked!

Now here’s the deal! God has a plan for us – for you and for me. It will work. We don’t know what it is, but we can trust God. God is trustworthy.