

Reformed Distinctives

Luther Nails the 95 Theses, October 31, 1517



- Luther drew up 95 propositions (or theses) not as a protest, but as an invitation to a debate. This was a university custom, as he posted them on the Castle Door at Wittenberg.
- He was primarily addressing the abuse of indulgences, people paying money to reduce punishment for themselves or someone else, either in this life or the next, in order that they have salvation.
- Luther argued that indulgences can't remove guilt, or not apply to purgatory, and are harmful because they create a false sense of security.
- Rome protested against Luther. In a debate with theologian John Eck, Luther said, "A council may sometimes err. Neither the church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture." Eck wanted Rome to declare Luther a heretic.

- In 1521, the pope declared Luther a heretic and expelled him from the church.
- Charles V, the German Emperor, to a Council. It is said, that when confronted, Luther said these famous words. “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither honest nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”
- Luther in some way had birthed a movement and other reformers appeared on the scene, resisting Rome.

- The Sixteenth Century Reformation is also known as the Protestant Reformation.
- It was a major religious and political challenge to the Catholic Church and papal authority.
- Reformers questioned perceived errors and abuses by the Catholic Church.
- The Reformation split the Western Church into the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church.
- Major reformers included such men as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox.

Group Question

If you come out of another church tradition or belief system (i.e. Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, etc.) what do you remember about what they believed or emphasized? What was important?

Was there something about your upbringing in that church or denomination you appreciated?

If Perimeter is your first church, what is emphasized here? What do you perceive is important?

The Five Solas

The Five Solas were an attempt to summarize biblical teaching on salvation. The Five *Solas* of the Reformation, distinguished the Reformers from the teachings of Rome.

sola scriptura (Scripture alone)

solus Christus (Christ alone)

sola gratia (grace alone)

sola fide (faith alone)

solī Deo gloria (glory to God alone)

Scripture Alone (*Sola Scriptura*)

- Scripture Alone is final authority on God's truth.
- *Sola Scriptura* acknowledges the facts that the Bible is the Word of God, inerrant, sufficient, without error, and the source of all truth.
- The Bible is the highest authority in a Christian's life.
- That does not negate human authority or tradition.

Scripture Alone

- It emphasizes the Bible alone as the source of authority for Christians. By saying, “Scripture alone,” the Reformers rejected both the divine authority of the Roman Catholic Pope and confidence in sacred tradition.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Christ Alone (*Solus Christus*)

- Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation.
- We could not save ourselves
- A man could not save; only God can save.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15)

Pelagius vs. Augustine

- In the 4th century, Pelagius, a British monk, taught that we were not born with original sin, but rather born “neutral.” Therefore, we could choose to obey God.
- Augustine, a bishop from Hippo (North Africa) said “no!” We need God’s grace to change us.
- Pelagius was eventually condemned but Augustine’s views were not fully accepted by the Roman Church. That is, though we need grace, we now cooperate with God in justification. This will be challenged by the Reformers.

Christ Alone

- *Christ Alone* emphasizes the role of Jesus in salvation.
- The Roman Catholic tradition had placed church leaders such as priests in the role of intercessor between the laity and God. The Reformers emphasized Jesus' role as our "high priest" who intercedes on our behalf before the Father.

On the cross, Jesus wasn't a sinner. God treated him as if we was, and you're not righteous, but he treats you as if you are. God treated Jesus as if he had lived your life so he could treat you, as if you had lived his. – John MacArthur

Grace Alone (*Sola Gratia*)

- Salvation is by Grace Alone.
- There is no merit (or works) on our part which earns salvation. It is strictly by God's grace, alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)



- Throughout his time, he was consumed by guilt and a sense of his sinfulness. No amount of penance, nor counsel from his peers could still Luther's conviction he was a miserable sinner. Although his confessor told him to love God, Luther one day burst out, "Love God? I do not love him – I hate him!"
- In 1515, when pondering Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Luther came upon the words Romans 1:17. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." This was the key that turned the lock and opened the door to everything else that would follow.

- “Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the just shall live his faith. Then I grasped that the justice of God is the righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.” He had come to his famous doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Faith Alone (*Sola Fide*)

- We are justified before God by faith alone.
- It is faith alone, not faith + works.
- However, it is not a faith that is alone. Works are important.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)

Glory of God Alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*)

- This emphasizes the glory of God as the goal of life.
- Rather than striving to ultimately please church leaders, keep a list of rules, or guard our own interests, our goal is to glorify the Lord.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

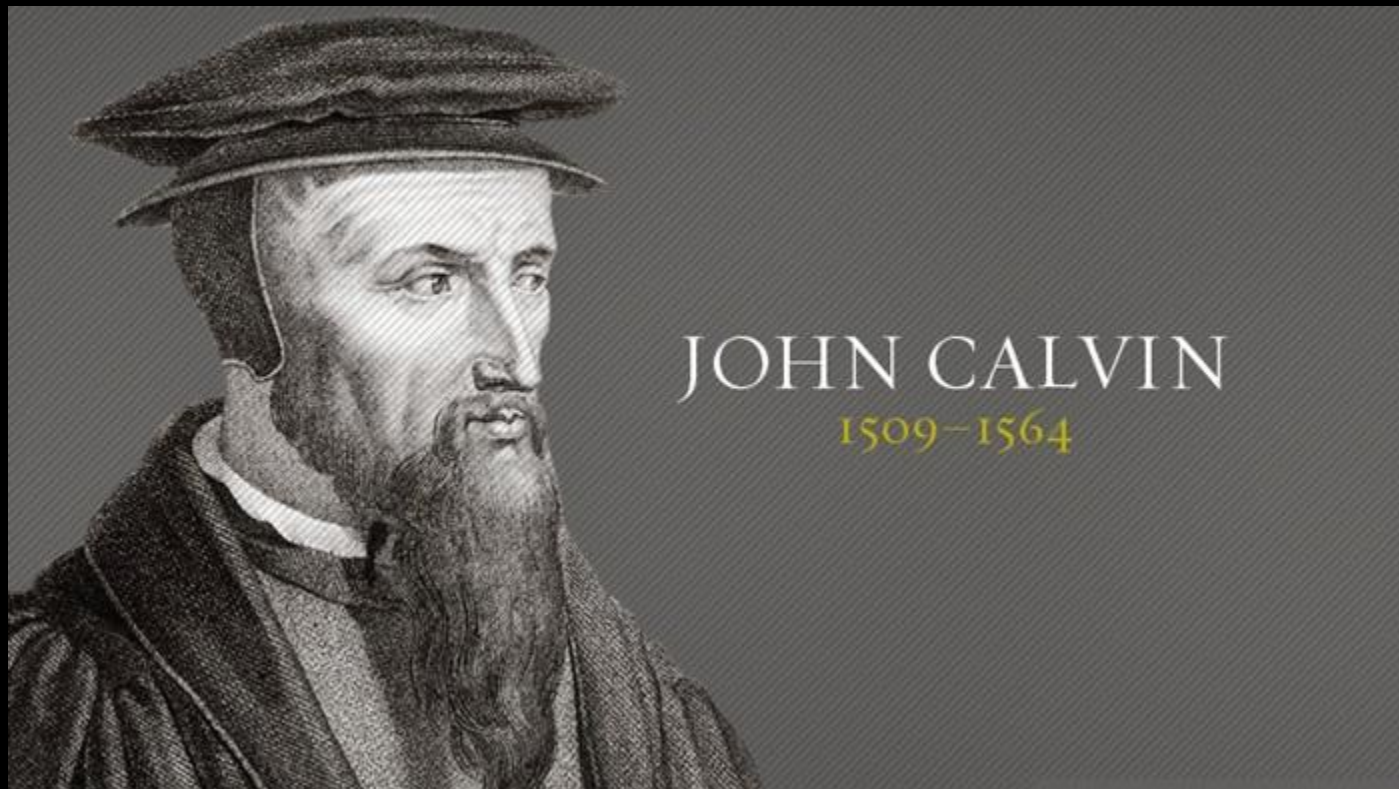
What is the chief and highest end of man? Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever. (WLC Q. 1)

The Five Solas

By God's grace alone, on the basis of Christ alone, received through faith alone, to the glory of God alone, with Scripture alone as the only, final, decisive, authority on truth. - John Piper

The Roman Catholic Response

The Council of Trent which concluded in 1564 emphasized the authority of the pope, the equality of Scripture and tradition, and justification through faith and love.



John Calvin

- Calvin emphasized the sovereignty of God, that He is sovereign over all things, including our salvation.
- Calvin emphasized our adoption, that we could know that we are justified by Him and will be when we die.
- Calvin wrote about predestination, but he did not invent or come up with the belief.
- The “Five Points of Calvinism” were written by his followers, approximately fifty years after Calvin’s death.

A Few Words About Predestination

- If you believe the Bible, you believe in predestination.
- The “debate” is how one chooses to define it.
- Do we dismiss Bible verses and passages because they do not make sense to us?
- If you “wrestle” to understand and believe predestination, you are ok. The key question is , “Does the Bible teach it?”

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care. (WCOF 3.8)

What Did the Reformers Contribute?

- They get us back to the Bible.
- They enlarge our vision of God, of who He is and His work.
- They encourage us that God (not us) is ultimately sovereign over our salvation.
- We are humbled by God's amazing grace!
- The glory goes to God, not people.

Group Question

When a preacher was asked once, “Why do you preach the gospel every week?” the preacher replied, “We leak.”

If the gospel is the “good news” of salvation in Jesus Christ, why might “we leak” and need to hear this continually?

What is Important For Us?

- May we emphasize the truth of Scripture.
- May worship be about God and not about us.
- May the Gospel of Jesus Christ be continually declared.
- May we submit ourselves to the church and its authority.
- May we encourage one another.
- May the glory of God be our primary motivator.