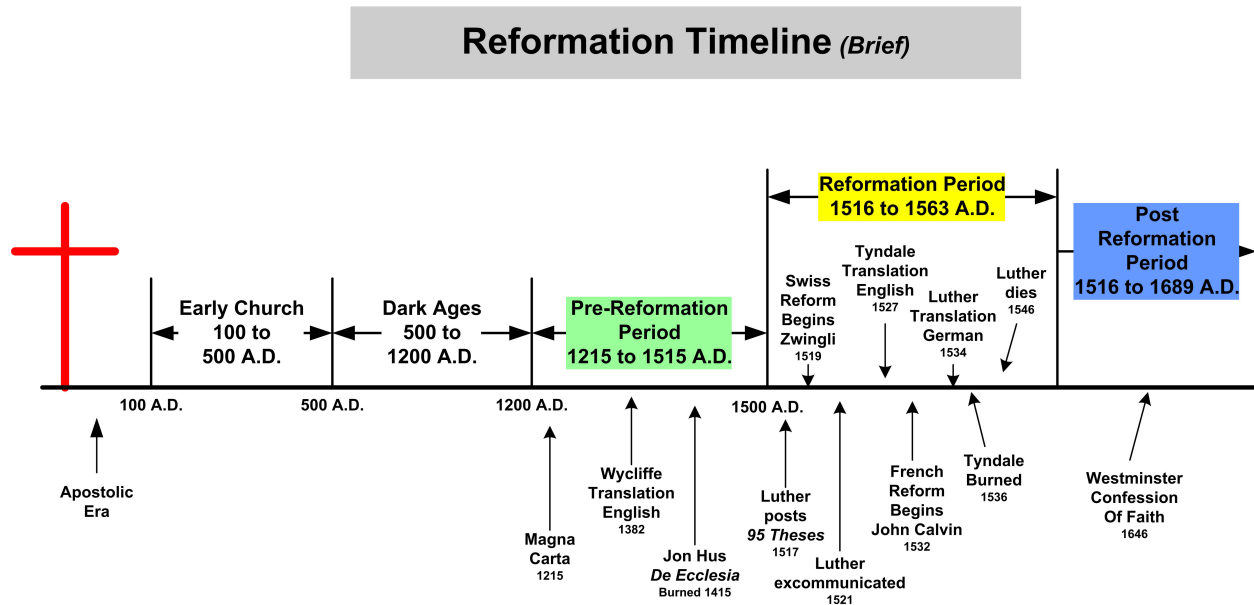


# The Gospel – The Message of Jesus Christ

## Justification by Faith – The Heart of the Gospel

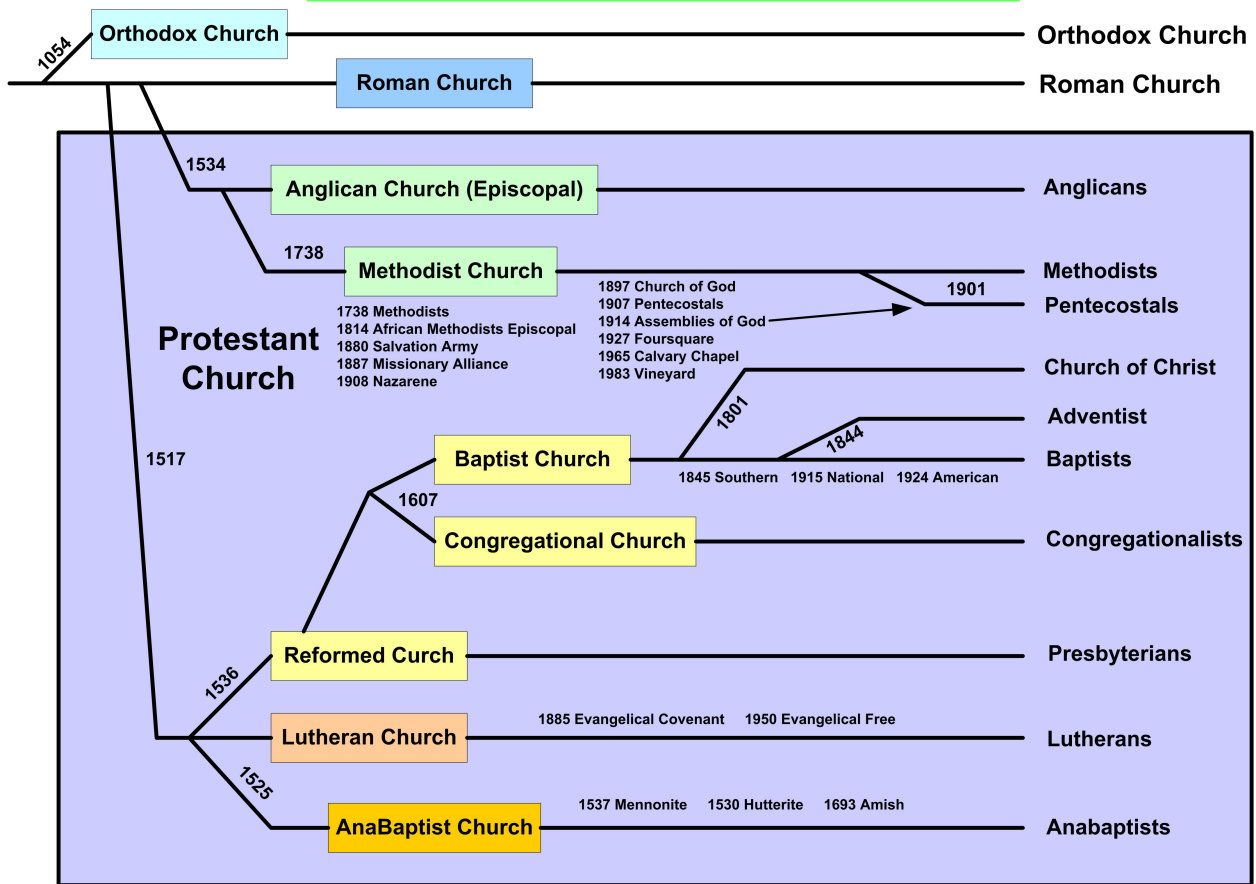
### The Protestant Reformation - What was the protest?

Surely the most profound and tumultuous time in Church History was the period of the Protestant Reformation. After centuries of the rule of the Roman Church over Christianity, the cries of petition against the abuses of the Church broke loose into a full scale rebellion against the Roman Church. During the Pre-reformation period, 1215-1515 A.D., many foundational activities culminated in the actual **Protestant Reformation**. These foundational things that took place were mainly surrounding the efforts of certain men like and John Wycliffe, Jon Hus and others who protested certain activities of the Papacy and Church. John Wycliffe, and later William Tyndale sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. During the **Dark Ages**, (the period between the fall of Rome in the 5th century and the Renaissance, 1415 A.D.), a time when the Bible was locked up in Latin by the Roman Church, there were very few literate people among the commons, and the only knowledge of Scripture that the common people held, was that which was learned from the priesthood in the Church. As the protest of these people grew stronger over time, it gave rise to several key events which eventually created a huge schism among Christians and spawned the **Protestant Reformation**, 1516-1563 A.D. Here is a brief timeline;



During this time several key men made public protests against the Pope and the Church which culminated in the spawning of several branches of Christianity such as the Lutheran, Anglican, Anabaptist and Reformed churches. These “branches” of Christianity were very focused on the biblical reform of Christianity and zealous to pattern the church after biblical directives such as a proper ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, Church Government, and the great doctrine of Justification by Faith. In summary, there were several different “branches” of Christianity that happened in several different places, led by several different men. However, these were all identified by the Roman Church as “**Protestantism**.” In the mind of the Roman Church, they were the rebels and protestors united against Papal control and Roman Church tradition. Here is a basic chart of the first “**Protestant**” branches of Christianity.

## The First Protestant Branches of Christianity



Because of this protest many of them were persecuted and killed by the influence of the Roman Church and many other governmental powers of the day. Of course after all these profound happenings, the face of Christianity would never be the same. There were now Bibles being printed in the common language and many people coming to a personal knowledge of the Word of God, and the Gospel was being preached in all European languages and being sent out into the remotest regions of the world. The Word of God had broken free from the tight Latin grip of the Roman Church, and a new liberty was unleashed upon the nations of mankind like never before! But in all of this controversy and struggle, what was at the heart of the protest was an error of essential nature to Historic Christian doctrine, and this could no longer be tolerated. The Gospel had been redefined over many years under Roman rule and the Reformers were not going to let it be undermined any longer. At the heart of many of the controversies that were being held out against the Church by the Reformers was a focus on the sufficiency of the atonement and the doctrine of Justification. And of course these are the essentials of the Gospel message.

### The Gospel and the Roman Church

Over many years, even centuries, Roman Christianity had morphed and become something very different that its earlier origins of the Early Church. The institution of several new and unbiblical rituals, traditions and practices almost completely redefined the Church. These church traditions became the focus of the church as she turned eyes away from the simplicity of the person and work of Christ, to the Ivory Tower of the Roman Church. Gradually over time these began to severely undermine the sufficiency of the atonement and the doctrine of Justification by grace

through faith in Christ. When all of these were added together, it made for a completely different form of Christianity than Jesus and the Apostles had taught. The focus had turned from the glorious good news of the person and work of Christ to the veneration of Popes and Saints, and the Church had become the richest institution on the earth off the back of the poor common people who were now to work their way to heaven through their own merit, or worse yet to purchase it through the sale of Indulgences.

### **A Brief Survey of Roman Rites and Traditions**

Here is a brief survey of these rites and traditions, and a few words about how they ultimately deny essential Christian doctrine.

**The Papacy** – Who is the head of Christ’s church? Well that is an easy question if you read the Bible (Col 1:18, 2:19). It is Christ. But in the Roman Church, He has been usurped by an earthly head, the so called “vicar of Christ,” a man demanding to be called the Holy Father (Matt 23:9), dressed in very costly vestments and living in a palace of unimaginable majesty and pomp (Matt 8:20). Will a truly godly man actually accept the title of Holy Father? Much could be said to compare the Pope to the teaching of the Bible, but a simple glance shows him to be far from the model set by Christ and the Apostles. Further, this Papacy is **nowhere found in Scripture**, nor is it even hinted at, much less does it have any didactic passage in Scripture explaining its character and nature. As the Bible clearly teaches a government of local plural elders(as servants to the body), the Popery of Rome is a “Pontification” of the worst sorts. The very history of the Papacy itself is littered with corruption and immorality. How can this be overlooked by any serious student of the Bible?

**The Priesthood and Monastic Societies** – Here we have an entire hierarchy of men who claim to be mediators between people and God. They take vows of celibacy and wear very costly vestments. All the while the Bible says....

**1 Timothy 2:5-6** - 5 For there is one God, and **one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time. NASB

The Levitical Priesthood of the Old Testament was fulfilled by Christ and destroyed by God in 70 A.D. Jesus is lifted up to the right hand of God having accomplished our redemption once for all time, He is our great High Priest.

**Hebrews 9:11-12** - 11 But **when Christ appeared as a high priest** of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, **but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.** NASB

The New Testament nowhere presents a special priesthood, here is another non-biblical concept of church government which by its very existence and definition **undermines the work that Christ has accomplished** as our “*once for all time - High Priest.*” More than this, believing Christians are robbed of understanding their true role to a lost world as now all Christians are seen as an holy nation of priests in the priesthood of all believers, with the “*priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God*” (Rom 15:16).

**1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10** - 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 **you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.....** 9 But **you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 **for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God;** you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. NASB

**The Eucharist and Transubstantiation** - In the Roman celebration of the Lord’s Supper, they have a unique teaching which suggests that the bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Jesus. This “Eucharist” is seen as a sacrifice of Christ which happens again and again to

cleansed those who draw near to worship. The issue here is that it is taught by Rome and suggests to the people of the church that sins that they have now committed have not yet been covered by the Blood of Christ until it is reapplied in the "Eucharist." Now this idea **severely undermines the work of Christ as our priest**, and violates the biblical teaching that Christ was offered "*once for all time*" and that in this He did in fact atone for all the sins of all of His people, and that through this "*one sacrifice*" has "*perfected forever*" those who trust Him by faith.

**Hebrews 10:10-15** - 10 By this will we **have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**. 11 And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, **having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time**, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. 14 For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified**. NASB

But the Roman Church maintains that Christ must be "re-sacrificed" again and again in order for the sins of worshippers to be cleansed. This is why they hold the "Mass" daily. Again this **undermines the sufficiency of the atonement** which Christ has accomplished.

**Hebrews 7:26-27** - 26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 **who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself**. NASB

**Hebrews 9:25-26** - 25 **nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year** with blood not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; **but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. NASB

**Purgatory** – The Roman Catechism states.... "*All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect*".... (from the Roman Catechism [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P2N.HTM#\\$1BY](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2N.HTM#$1BY)) Now consider what is being implied in this teaching. It surely says that it is possible for a Christian to die in a state "*imperfectly purified,*" and that they need to "*undergo purification in order to achieve the holiness necessary to enter heaven.*" Again we have a doctrine that **severely undermines the sufficiency of the atonement** that Christ has accomplished. The clear denial of the Gospel here is evident to all. Does the believer in Christ need to "achieve the holiness necessary" through the torment of flames, or has it been achieved by Christ already by His death on the Cross? Let us hear God's commentary on this matter....

**Colossians 1:21-22** - 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet **He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach**. NASB

**Hebrews 10:14** - 14 For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified**. NASB

**1 Corinthians 1:30-31** - 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption**, 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." NASB

**Ephesians 1:7** - 7 **In Him we have redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, NASB

Consider how this **undermines the love and mercy of God held out in the Gospel**. Shall our loving heavenly Father call us to repentance and faith and then cast us into the flames of purification so that we can be adequately tormented for our sins?

**Romans 5:8-10** - 8 But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died **for us**. 9 Much more then, having now **been justified by His blood**, we shall be **saved from the wrath of God** through Him. 10 For if while **we were enemies, we were reconciled to God** through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life**. NASB

Further, how long is long enough in the fire to atone for sins? I tell you one sin is worthy of eternal fire with no hope of ever escaping, but Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

**Romans 8:1-2** - 8:1 There is **therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. NASB

**Indulgences** - The Roman Catechism states... *“An indulgence is the remission before God of temporal punishment for sins whose guilt is already forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful gains under certain and defined conditions by the assistance of the Church which as minister of redemption dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. Can. 993 An indulgence is partial or plenary insofar as it partially or totally frees from the temporal punishment due to sins”*.... Again we see the **sufficiency of the atonement severely undermined** as we still have “temporal punishment due to sins” to be paid. The obvious question here; Did Christ’s sacrifice put away sins once for all believers, or not? This is an obvious denial of essential Christian doctrine.

**Hebrews 9:26** - 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. NASB

Do we have redemption through blood of Christ? Are our sins really covered or is there a further price to be paid? Shall we now buy the forgiveness of sins with money or suffering? This is exactly what the doctrine of indulgences teaches. More than this, the way in which this teaching was used to garner money from the poor peasants during the time of the Reformation was reprehensible. Consider a brief excerpt from a popular online encyclopedia.... *“The false doctrine and scandalous conduct of the “pardoners” were an immediate occasion of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, Pope Leo X offered indulgences for those who gave alms to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The aggressive marketing practices of Johann Tetzel in promoting this cause provoked Martin Luther to write his Ninety-Five Theses, protesting against what he saw as the purchase and sale of salvation. In Thesis 28 Luther objected to a saying attributed to Tetzel: “As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs”*....” Here we have the church selling forgiveness to common people in order to raise funds to build an earthly temple of astounding cost and grandeur for the great Pontif to inhabit. I will appeal to your conscience, is something wrong with this picture? What does the Scripture say?

**1 Peter 1:18-21** - 18 knowing that **you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold** from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 **but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ**. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, **so that your faith and hope are in God**. NASB

We could go on for some time discussing the many ways in which the Roman Church has and is denying the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ to save us from sins and bring us to God. There are many more **fundamental denials of Christ’s work** in such doctrines as....

- Penance
- Veneration of Mary and the Saints and prayers being offered to them
- Confessional
- Relics

These and many more were the occasion of the Protest. This is what the **Protestants** have taken issue with the Roman Church over. It is no small matter. During the time of the **Reformation** all these things had culminated in a very grievous and unbiblical system of religion which sparked a rebellion against the Roman Church from which the Gospel has gone out as clearly and brightly as the noonday sun. This is because the central issues of the Gospel were at stake in the heart of the Reformation controversy. You see, most of these issues center around the issue of **Justification**. What is it that justifies us in the sight of God, and how is that justification applied to our life? In other words, how is a person saved from sins and reconciled to God? These matters are summed up biblically in the understanding of the doctrine of Justification. So what is it that the Reformers were saying in response to these matters? Let us consider this.

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## The Pillars of Reformation teaching - The Five Solas

As the protest took shape in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the issues became more and more clearly defined. When the Reformers sought to clarify the main tenants of the Protest, they developed a few phrases or slogans to point to the main theological issues that were at stake. These became known as the “*five solas*.” The Latin word “*sola*” is translated “*only*” or “*alone*” in English. The “*five solas*” articulated five fundamental beliefs of the Protestant Reformation in **contrast** to those of the Roman Church to which they were protesting. These five summarized what they saw as the fundamental principles of Christian life and faith.

### The Five “*Solas*” of the Protestant Reformation

<b>Sola Scriptura</b> Scripture Alone	Scripture <b><u>ONLY</u></b> is the final rule of Christian life, faith and practice. It is clear, sufficient and self-interpreting.
<b>Sola Christus</b> Christ Alone	Christ is the <b><u>ONLY</u></b> mediator between God and man. Christ’s person and work alone are <b><u>sufficient</u></b> to save.
<b>Sola Gratia</b> Grace Alone	God’s grace <b><u>ONLY</u></b> is the origin of salvation. All elements of salvation are an unmerited gift from God.
<b>Sola Fide</b> Faith Alone	The <b><u>ONLY</u></b> means of Justification is <b><u>faith</u></b> , apart from works of the Law. Faith <b><u>alone</u></b> appropriates salvation.
<b>Soli Deo Gloria</b> God’s Glory Alone	To God <b><u>ONLY</u></b> belongs the glory for salvation. This alone is to be our <b><u>motivation</u></b> for life and worship.

Not only did these five fundamental principles summarize the Reformation protest, but they also clearly define the fundamental principles of salvation and Christian faith. These clearly summarize the Gospel message and point to the heart of the issues at stake in the Gospel. This happened because the Roman Church had over a long period of time moved away from the Gospel and the person and work of Christ was no longer central to the life and practice of the Church. This resulted in the pompous display of man-made religion, with all of its rites and traditions, which religion the Reformers were formally protesting. The result theologically was a clarification of the main tenants of the Christian Faith and a renewed focus on the heart of the Gospel message, the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**Sola Scriptura** – The Scripture alone is the final rule of Christian life, faith and practice. It is clear and self-interpreting. The issue here of course was in *contrast* to the Roman teaching that the Church (tradition and the fathers) was the final authority of faith and practice. More than this, they taught that only the Church and the Priesthood could rightly interpret the Scripture because it was inaccessible to the common man. Sola Scriptura clearly meant that not only was the Scripture (not the Church), the final rule of faith and practice, but that it could be understood by the common man (not only a special priesthood) because it was clear (perspicuous) and understandable because the Holy Spirit could interpret the meaning to each believer. Not only this but Sola Scriptura also meant that the Bible was a “***complete***” revelation of God, in its closed “***canon***,” and that it was “***sufficient***” to address all matters in Christian life and to explain to us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

**Sola Christus** – Christ is the only mediator between God and man. Christ’s person and work alone are sufficient to save. More than this, Jesus Christ is the only “*incarnate*” self-revelation of God who has come and explained God to us. He is the “*object of faith*” and the focal point of all of human history. This of course was in *contrast* to the special priesthood of the Roman Church and the teaching that only the Church could explain or reveal God to the people. Christ Himself, His person and His work ONLY have sufficient merit to “*justify*” us before God and provide a “*righteousness*” (Rom 3:21-24) for us (not our own, Phil 3:9) that is complete in the sight of God. His life and death are the basis on which the believer is justified (it cannot be merited by good works, Eph 2:8-9), and this is absolutely necessary in the sight of God (John 14:6), being the only sufficient grounds for justification by God. Christ and His teaching are the only way to God, the only true revelation of God in history, and the only Redeemer of mankind.

**Sola Gratia** – God’s grace only is the origin of salvation. All elements of salvation are an unmerited gift from God. God is the One who has reconciled us to Himself, having planned, purchased and applied (Trinity implied) salvation to each individual believer. He is the One who predestines, calls, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies. In short, salvation is wholly the work of God, from first to last, its origin and completion is His work. Therefore, salvation is “not merited” by any work of man nor can it be, in any sense, merited by anything we can do. This of course was in *contrast* to the Roman teaching of Merit, Indulgences, Purgatory and the like. We cannot work for or buy salvation, nor can we suffer long enough in Purgatory in order to purge sin from us. Rather, salvation is the “*free gift*” (Rom 6:23) of God, “*not of works*” (Eph 2:9), and justification is a “*gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 3:24).

**Sola Fide** – The only means of Justification is faith, apart from works of the Law. Faith alone appropriates salvation. This of course was in *contrast* to the Roman teaching that justification is complete only after we have become righteous in our own persons, through faith AND perseverance in good works to the end of life. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation cannot be earned or merited in any way by people (Eph 2:8-9), but that it is a free gift from God’s good pleasure (Rom 5:16-17) to give it. Further that Christ’s righteousness alone is sufficient as merit before God in order to justify a person, being the only Redeemer (Eph 1:7) and full payment for sin and Provider of righteousness having fulfilled the Law in His perfect life (Rom 10:4). Therefore, Justification, indeed reconciliation to God can only be appropriated to us by faith alone (Rom 5:1), which object is Christ alone (Rom 5:9), and this comes as a gift by God’s grace (Rom 3:24) alone to us. There is no other means of justification but faith (Rom 3:28), and this is “*apart from the works of the Law.*”

**Soli Deo Gloria** - To God only belongs the glory for salvation. This alone is to be our motivation for life and worship. Because salvation is wholly the work of God, from first to last, it is to God alone that glory and worship is to be given (Rom 11:36). This is in *contrast* of course to the Roman teaching of Papal exaltation, and the veneration of Mary and the Saints. Salvation is something God gives as a free gift and He is to be acknowledged as the sole provider of it. The exaltation of people, even the best of saints, is a diabolical form of idolatry which is wrongfully robbing God’s glory from Him (Rev 19:10, 22:8-9). Rather, if someone is a great saint, we should rightly be thankful for their good service in the Church, but God alone is to be glorified and venerated for working such grace in that saint. Moreover, the only right motive for worship, service and good works is in fact to glorify God (Matt 5:16) so that in our worship of God people might see Him (Phil 2:15-16) and His glory and virtue would shine through our life as a witness (1 Pet 2:9) to God’s good virtue, which is in us only because of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

## The Main Thing

It is no small thing that these “*five solas*” were given in order to **clarify the essentials of Christian teaching**. They show us what is at the heart of the Gospel, the message of the person and work of Jesus Christ. They teach us exactly what is central to the Christian Faith and what is required to have an orthodox or genuine profession of the Historic (what the true Church has always maintained) and Apostolic (what Jesus and the Apostles taught) Christian Faith. In other words, they teach what the “*main thing*” in Christianity really is. How could the Church have gotten so far from the central teaching about Christ and salvation? Well the truth is, we are in a constant struggle to reaffirm the truth of the Gospel to each successive generation because our enemy the Devil is waging war against the truth of the Gospel in every generation. He is always reinventing old lies into new ways to deceive us and obscure the true Gospel. He represents himself as a beacon of light and truth with false prophets and teachers, but their message is only a bit of truth, perverted into a devious lie which robs the Gospel message of its power to save.

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15** - 13 For **such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ**. 14 And no wonder, **for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light**. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. NASB

As we look around in our world, just as with any period of Church History, we can see perversions of the Gospel by false prophets and false teachers abounding everywhere. This has been true ever since the first century when the Apostles contended for the truth of the Gospel in their own generation. Of this fact, our Lord and the Apostles strictly warned.

**Matthew 24:11** - "And **many false prophets will arise**, and will mislead many. NASB

**2 Peter 2:1-3** - But false prophets also arose among the people, just as **there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and **because of them the way of the truth will be maligned**; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. NASB

Therefore it is incumbent upon each new generation to clarify and to preach the Gospel with conviction and with clarity. Lest we think that we will not succumb to the deceitfulness of Satan or his schemes of deception, we must keep the main thing “*THE Main Thing!*” We must continually test ourselves and the things we believe in order to always maintain the purity and simplicity of the Gospel.

**2 Corinthians 11:2-4** - 3 But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, **your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ**. 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, **or a different gospel which you have not accepted**, you bear this beautifully. NASB

**1 John 4:1** – 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world**. NASB

From the Reformers then, we have learned a huge and unmistakable lesson about essential Christian Doctrine. They have clarified and recorded for us the essential message of the Gospel and the doctrine of Salvation. These “*five solas*” then are great way for us to keep the essentials always before us. Let us not enthrone the Reformers or the banners that they carried, but let us instead enthrone the Lord Jesus, the living Word and know and understand the truth and principle about Him that the Reformers clarified so well for us. The heart of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the center of Christian salvation and the centerpiece of Christian worship. Let us not forget to keep Him as the “*main thing*” and always keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus! Let us say with the Apostle Paul, “*I am determined to nothing but Christ and Him crucified!*”

**1 Corinthians 2:1-2** - 2 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For **I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified**. NASB