

Notes Regarding the Five Solae

- 1. Grace Alone (Sola Gratia)**
- 2. Faith Alone (Sola Fide)**
- 3. Christ Alone (Solus Christus)**
- 4. Scripture Alone (Sola Scriptura)**
- 5. Glory to God Alone (Soli Deo Gloria)**

These five phrases, often referred to or mentioned in Latin, convey the tenants of the reformer's understanding of salvation. While there is discussion as to whether or not the phrases were used collectively as a test of faith, it is certain that their individual truths were used by the reformers as a basis for understanding and conveying the biblical truth of salvation.

Although the reformers are most noted for using the truths associated with each phrase to differentiate biblical truth from the doctrines of Roman Catholicism, it should be remembered that the reformers did not invent these truths. The truths associated with each phrase belong to God and are clearly displayed in His written Word contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible. Therefore, as always, they continue to serve as a means of distinguishing between truth and error.

Used together, these phrases provide a concise means of stating the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, we can say in summary, the good news of the Gospel is that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone!

Grace Alone (Sola Gratia)

Sola Gratia is Latin for *grace alone*. The doctrine of *grace alone* refers specifically to the Biblical truth that salvation is by grace alone. In this doctrine God's grace (God's unmerited favor) is granted to the elect because of the loving kindness of God apart from any merit on the part of the elect.

Grace Operative Prior to Time

When we consider the subject of grace alone we often jump immediately to the truths regarding regeneration. There we correctly point out the fact that regeneration is a monergistic work by God alone (explained later). A work whereby God, based on no merit of the person regenerated and apart from any cooperation from the person, thus by grace alone, regenerates a person (gives one a new nature). This new nature is the basis of new desires and consequently the person believes the Gospel. Thus, one's salvation is rightly by grace alone through faith alone.

These facts are true and are necessary for a proper understanding of the doctrine of grace alone. However, when we go immediately to the monergistic work of God in regeneration we miss the foundation of grace alone. Moving immediately to the monergistic work of God in regeneration is like considering the structure of a building without regard for its foundation. This is similar to examining the health of a tree and its fruit without consideration for its root.

In a similar fashion, the **doctrine of grace alone** is a doctrine which is rooted not in time at the point of regeneration but in eternity prior to the existence of time. So that regeneration by grace alone which transpires in time is actually a continuance of that which was established in eternity. An expansion of the definition provided above would be, *sola gratia (grace alone) refers to the grace of God whereby God, according to His will and work alone acted efficaciously before time toward the elect and acts efficaciously in time on the elect in order to reconcile them to Himself apart from any intrinsic condition to include merit, will ability or cooperation on the part of the elect.*

Therefore, to have a thorough understanding of the doctrine of grace alone we must begin where the Bible teaches that grace alone began. We can do this by asking the question "Was this grace operative in eternity past?" The answer is a definite yes! God's efficacious grace was first expressed before time in eternity past at which point, except in the mind of God, the elect did not exist. Because the elect did not exist so as to have done anything either good or bad God's grace was truly unmerited favor.

In the following verses the underlined portions attest to God's grace operating prior to time. Ephesians 1:6 clearly designates God's grace as that which was operating.

“⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1:4-6 NASU)

“²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” (Romans 8:29-31 NASU)

Notice that verse 31 contains three phrases and two questions.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”

The first phrase constitutes a question, *“What shall we say to these things?”* This question is constructed in such a way so as to lead to a necessary conclusion in light of information conveyed in the preceding verses, specifically verses 28-30. The second phrase, *“If God is for us...”* provides both an answer to the first question and the basis for the second question. The answer to the question *“What shall we say to these things?”* and necessary conclusion to be drawn from verses 28-30 of Romans 8 is God is for His elect. And in the context of verses 29 and 30 God being for the elect is a condition in effect from eternity past or prior to time.

The third phrase and second question of verse 31, *“...who is against us?”* is based on the phrase *“If God is for us...”* In this verse the Holy Spirit is conveying the fact that since God is for His elect from eternity past there is no one or nothing that can be effectively against them.

Grace Operative in Time

How does God maintain and demonstrate in time the solitary nature of His grace that was operating before time began?

Continuing with our verses in Romans 8 verse 32 builds on the fact that God is for the elect as it shows how God demonstrated this in time. It conveys that God, in time delivered His Son over to death and thereby demonstrated in time what was true before time that God loves the elect and is for them (See this transition from eternity past to time in Romans 5:8).

Therefore, in the light of the facts that the elect are predestined by God prior to time, that God is for them as demonstrated in time by Christ dying for them Paul asks,

“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies...”

Romans 8:33 NASU

The final answer to the question, ***“Who will bring a charge against God's elect?”*** is no one! Why? Because it is God Who justifies. And according to verse 34 God justifies on the basis of Christ, Who died (atoned for sin), was raised (God's affirmation and acceptance of Christ's atoning work), Who is at the right hand of God (exalted to the highest place of honor) and intercedes for the elect (acts as their advocate). Therefore, no one can justifiably condemn the elect and no one or nothing will separate the elect from the love of God which existed prior to time (Eph. 1:4-5) and was conveyed in time through the grace that is in Christ. Therefore, Paul continues,

³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written,

***"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."***

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35-39 NASU

Such love (Compare Rm. 8:35, 39; 9:13) is expressed by God's grace alone as He has mercy on whom He will and compassion on whom He will (Rm. 9:15). This grace being toward the elect prior to time (Rm. 8:29, *foreknew*), prior to the actual existence of the elect (Rm. 9:11a), prior to their works (Rm. 9:11b) demonstrates that God's grace is indeed grace alone as ***“... it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God Who has mercy.”*** (Rm. 9:16)

Now let's examine how God applies His grace to the elect in their actual inward experience of His grace and in doing so maintains the standard of the solitary nature of His grace (grace alone).

Scripture maintains the continuity between grace alone in eternity past with grace alone in time. We saw that the death of Christ as it occurred in time was a continuance of God's grace in operation prior to time (In addition to Romans 8:32 and 34 previously cited, see also Heb. 2:9). Likewise, the Bible shows clearly that the actual application of God's grace alone in Christ alone to the elect is also a necessary continuance of that which was established in eternity past. This also is conveyed in the context of Romans 8:29-30. Note again that the words *foreknew* and *predestined* in verse 29 pertain to eternity past. Next, verse 30 shows that those predestined are *called*. This call is referred to as the *effectual call* of God and pertains to the new life God gives to the elect sinner. This call takes place in time as it involves the actual inward experience of the elect with God's grace. We will look more at this later but for now note that the call of those predestined is clearly a continuance in time of that grace established prior to time. Therefore, God's grace which is God's unmerited favor, as it is experienced in time by the elect, is by nature an extension or continuation of that which God began in eternity past when as yet the elect did not exist. As such and because the elect did not exist when God graciously chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4 and 6) they could not have possibly merited God's grace then and consequently in the actual experience of that grace the elect cannot be meritorious, otherwise grace alone as established in eternity past would be voided.

How God maintains the solitary nature of His grace in its application to the elect in time is conveyed in the elements of the *effectual call*. This initial experience of God's grace is regeneration and pertains to that point in time when God gives new spiritual life to the sinner. Therefore, maintaining the standard of *grace alone* how does God maintain and demonstrate the solitary nature of His grace in actual regeneration?

To answer this, first consider what is meant by *merit*. Merit refers to that which is worthy of reward based on intrinsic worth, commendable work or a consenting will. Therefore, since the elect did not exist when God chose them, it could not be said they possessed intrinsic worth, commendable work or a consenting will. Furthermore, the Bible clearly conveys the fact that even in time mankind, to include the elect does not merit God's grace. How then does God maintain and demonstrate the solitary nature of His grace in actual regeneration, solely by giving a person new life according to His eternal will.

The Bible expresses the exclusivity of the operation of grace (grace alone) for regeneration in three irrefutable ways by:

1. Describing mankind's condition

God's description of mankind's condition rules out **intrinsic worth**, **commendable work** and **consenting will** on the part of man and therefore describes the natural man as not being meritorious of God's grace. Therefore, regeneration is by grace alone.

a. No **intrinsic worth** meriting God's grace:

- None Righteous (Rm. 3:10)
- None who understands (Rm. 3:11)
- They are useless (Rm. 3:12)
- They have no fear of God (Rm. 3:18)
- They are helpless (Rm. 5:6)
- They are ungodly (Rm. 5:6)
- They are subject to the wrath of God (Rm. 5:9)
- They are hostility (Rm. 8:7a)
- They are spiritually dead in sin (Eph. 2:1)
- They are by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3)
- They are darkness (Eph. 5:8)

b. No **commendable work** meriting God's grace:

- None who seek for God (Rm. 3:11)
- There is not even one who does good (Rm. 3:12)
- They do not submit to the law of God (Rm. 8:7b)
- They do not accept the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14a)
- They walk according to the sinful patterns of the world (Eph. 2:2 with 1 Jn. 2:16)
- They walk according to the devil (Eph. 2:2)
- They practice sin (1Jn. 3:4-10)

c. No **consenting will** meriting God's grace:

- God's grace of regeneration is not the result of consenting or cooperating human will (Jn. 1:12-13; Rm. 9:16a)

2. Declaring plainly the solitary nature of God's Grace

- Saved by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).
- Apart from works (Rm. 3:27-28; 4:6; 9:11, 16; Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:10-14; Titus 3:7)

3. Displaying God's work in regeneration

- Born of God (Jn. 1:12-13; Jn. 3:3-8)
- God works sovereignly to bring about regeneration (Jn. 3:27; 6:37-39, 44-45)

- In eternity past God appointed people to eternal life and in time regenerates them resulting in faith (Acts 13:48)
- The Lord opens the heart (Acts 16:14)
- Depends on God Who has mercy (Rm. 9:16)
- Born again by the will of God (Jm. 1:18)
- Born again by the Word of God (1 Pt. 1:23)

God’s Work in Regeneration

A. Regeneration (Born Again)

When God implants new life in a person who was formerly dead in sin that person is said to be regenerated or born from above. *Regeneration* refers to a spiritual birth as opposed to a physical birth and is brought about solely by the supernatural work of God according to His eternal will.

Truths regarding regeneration:

- Regeneration is a monergistic work of God. The term *monergistic* means “one working.” Therefore, regeneration is absolutely the work of God alone. The sinner works neither for nor with God to achieve regeneration.
- In the logical order of salvation regeneration comes before faith as faith is a gift given as a component of regeneration. Therefore, because of regeneration a person believes as opposed to a person becoming regenerate because he believes. This point is critical as reversing the order nullifies the doctrine of grace alone.
- Regeneration describes birth **not** growth. Therefore, regeneration is a one time event as opposed to a process. It is accomplished in a single event at a single point in time.
- Although regeneration is a single work as opposed to a process, regeneration begins the process of sanctification. *Sanctification* is the necessary effect of regeneration. While the regenerate can be referred to as having been sanctified in the sense of being set apart for God, *sanctification* generally describes growth not birth. *Sanctification* is a lifelong process in which the regenerate cooperates with God as God conforms the regenerated person to the image of Christ. Because the regenerated person cooperates with God in the sanctification process *sanctification* is a synergistic work. A *synergistic work* refers to “working together” as opposed to “one working” as in the case of *monergism*.

Differences Between Regeneration and Sanctification	
Regeneration	Sanctification
Monergistic	Synergistic
Spiritual Birth	Spiritual Growth
Single Event	Lifelong Process
Begins Sanctification	Necessary Effect of Regeneration

B. Effectual call (Irresistible Grace)

God brings about regeneration through the *effectual call*. The *effectual call* is an inward call of God by which God accomplishes His Sovereign eternal will in regenerating His elect. Truths regarding the effectual call:

- The effectual call is a gracious call because it is not merited by the sinner.
- The effectual call is effectual in that it accomplishes God's sovereign eternal will as it prevails over the sinner's natural sinful disposition toward God.
- The work accomplished by the *effectual call* is that of imparting new life (regeneration) to the sinner. Consequently, the sinner's disposition toward God and the things of God is changed so that the sinner responds by faith.
- The *effectual call* is also referred to as **irresistible grace**.
- The *effectual call* is irresistible on two accounts:
 1. God sovereignly accomplishes His will by graciously prevailing over a person's natural enmity against Him giving the person a new nature.
 2. Having received a new nature and thus a new disposition toward God the sinner no longer resists the grace of God but responds positively by the gift of faith received from God at the time of the effectual call.

Because the Bible expresses the exclusivity of grace (grace alone) in salvation in time through its irrefutable description of man's condition, declaration of the solitary nature of God's grace and display of God's work of regeneration the only biblically sound conclusion is that all of salvation is by grace alone!

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB

Faith Alone (Sola Fide)

Under the umbrella of grace alone are the solas of *faith alone* and *Christ alone*. The doctrine of *sola fide* or faith alone was the rally cry of the reformation. The phrase conveyed the biblical truth regarding justification or in other words how a sinner is deemed to be righteous before God in the light of God's holy nature and His holy law.

God is holy and God's law expresses that holiness by its demand for perfect righteousness. On the other hand, man by nature is sinful and expresses his enmity against God and His holiness through violations of God's law in the form of sinful deeds.

Therefore in the light of the facts of God's holiness and man's sinfulness how and on what basis is the sinner determined to be right with God? Furthermore, how can the justly deserved punishment for violating the law be satisfied? The answer to these questions is specifically addressed in the two solas *faith alone* and *Christ alone*.

Understanding Faith

The phrase *faith alone* pertains specifically to the doctrine of justification (How a sinner is deemed to be righteous before God). Prior to examining *justification* we will briefly examine *faith*. Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* provides a simple definition of faith as, "Trust or dependence on God based on the fact that we take him at his word and believe what he has said."¹

Louis Berkhoff defines true saving faith as, "a faith that has its seat in the heart and is rooted in the regenerate life."²

An examination of Christ's words in Matthew 11:28-30 will give us a working knowledge of the biblical doctrine of faith.

²⁸ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

Although Jesus did not employ the word faith in these words He did convey through familiar and vivid imagery the tenants of biblical faith to the people of His day. The imagery of a yoke which was a large piece of wood secured to the backs of oxen or other beasts of burden by a collar around the neck and then attached to a cart or plow did not fall on deaf ears. The people of that day knew right well the significance of the yoke. Many of them were farmers and regularly yoked animals to pull plows and carry large loads. Others saw such conditions in their streets every day.

But the imagery did not stop with animals. At times and in various ways people had also been put under the yoke as their nations were enslaved to captors. There is little doubt that the people of Christ's day had heard of the burdens placed on their ancestors by the Egyptians and Assyrians as they yoked their slaves.

¹Grudem, Wayne; *Systematic Theology*, Published by Zondervan; © 1994 by Wayne Grudem, pg. 1242.

²Berkhoff, Louis; *Systematic theology*, Published by The Banner of Truth, 1958; Reprinted 2005, pg. 503.

Jesus invited the weary and heavy laden to come to Him for rest (v. 28). Specifically, He stated that the rest in view was rest for their souls (v. 29). It was apparent then that the rest in view was a spiritual rest. The doctrinal teaching by the leading religious instructors of the day burdened the people with rituals and regulations that could never make a person right with God (Mt. 23:1-4). Additionally, they taught that in order to be made right with God it was necessary that one keep God's law, something they were never able to do (Acts 15:10). The Bible compares the teaching of attempting to keep the law of God in order to be saved or made right with God to that of a negative yoke of slavery in Galatians 5:1,

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

As stated by Peter in Acts 15:10 this was a yoke no one could bear. Therefore, Christ's invitation was for those under the burden of sin and the burden of futile self-effort to keep various regulations including God's law in order to be right with God.

Upon examination of Christ's invitation there are **three basic elements** that must be in place in a person's life in order to experience the rest Christ promised. The first two pertain to the mind as they address knowledge and the third pertains to one's will. Together these three elements constitute the elements of biblical faith.

- 1. Knowledge.** In order to take Christ's yoke upon one's self a person would need to have some knowledge of their own situation (*weary and heavy-laden*); Christ, Who He is and what He does (*Come to Me, I will give you rest, I am gentle and humble in heart, My yoke, My burden*); the significance of a yoke (*take My yoke, My yoke is easy, My burden is light*).
- 2. Assent to the knowledge.** It is one thing to have knowledge but merely possessing knowledge does not mean that a person agrees with or approves of the information known. Devils believe facts about God and Jesus showing they have knowledge but stand in opposition to those very facts (Mk. 1:24; Jm. 2:19); Men do the same (Gen. 4:1-16; Jn. 3:1-2; Rm. 1:21). In order to come to Christ and take His yoke and burden one would not only need to have knowledge but would also need to be in confident agreement with the facts associated with Christ and His command to take His yoke.
- 3. Volition (will).** Finally, a person may have knowledge and even assent to the validity of that knowledge but not necessarily for him or her self. Someone might say, “I see that is good for others but not for me.” Therefore, the third element that must be in place in a person's life in order to experience Christ's rest is that of will. Not merely a “sense of being willing” but the will itself expressed by actually taking Christ's yoke, that is

willfully placing one's own neck under the yoke of Christ. In this case a person actually appropriates Christ's yoke for him/herself. Such an act of will conveys deep trust. Jesus did not say be willing to take His yoke but "*Take My yoke upon you...*"

Together, these three factors *knowledge*, *assent* to knowledge and *volition* constitute the elements of biblical saving faith and provide us a working knowledge of faith. These three essential elements are communicated in the following definition of saving faith.

(1) *notitia*, knowledge, the actual content of the gospel and the promises of God;. (2) *assensus*, assent, by which the intellect acknowledges the truth of *notitia*, apart from any personal trust or saving appropriation of that knowledge;. (3) *fiducia*, trust, or *apprehensio fiducialis*, faithful apprehension, which appropriates savingly, by an act of the will, the true knowledge of the promises of God in Christ. Saving faith, therefore, cannot be merely intellectual; it must also be volitional.³

Understanding Faith as a Gift Accompanying Regeneration

Having established the necessary presence of these three elements let's return to the imagery Jesus communicated. Jesus invited the weak and heavy laden sinners to come to Him for rest but then He made an extraordinary statement, "*Take My yoke upon you...*" Christ's invitation was to those already weak and heavy laden being under the yoke of their own sin and inability to keep the endless regulations of the Pharisees, let alone God's law and to these people Jesus offered another yoke! For deliverance, for spiritual rest Jesus offered a burden (v. 30). This is similar to Luke 9:23-24 where Jesus explained,

"... If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."
NASB

To the natural man such a command to place his neck under the yoke or to a man seeking life to tell him he must lose his life, would be appalling even foolish! The very thought of such acts runs contrary to their being. Consequently, they will not believe.

On the other hand, to the spiritual man, that is the one who has been regenerated by God, such a command to gain spiritual rest resonates with his new nature and consequently with the accompanying gift of faith he believes.

³ Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Copyright © 1985 by Baker Book House Company. All rights reserved.

From this we see that faith is a gift that accompanies regeneration. Ephesians 2:8 states this clearly, “***For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...***” The Bible states clearly that not all have faith (2 Thess. 3:2). In the light of Jn. 3:3, 5; Romans 8:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:1 which together convey that there is nothing in the natural man by which he can see, enter, agree with, or receive the kingdom of God, faith is therefore, by necessity, a gift of grace that accompanies new life in Christ.

The **regenerated** sinner understands certain knowledge from the Word of God concerning God, Christ and himself, he/she assents to that knowledge in that he/she approves of it, repents of his/her sins and trusts in Christ alone for forgiveness of sins. This is biblical saving faith.

Understanding Justification

The doctrine pertaining to the phrase faith alone (*sola fide*) pertains specifically to the question of justification or in other words how a sinner is deemed to be righteous before God in the light of God’s holy nature and His holy law. Initially in this study it was stated that God is holy and God’s law expresses that holiness by its demand for perfect righteousness. At the same time man by nature is sinful and expresses his sinfulness against God and His holiness by violating God’s law in the form of sinful deeds. The Bible explains that this condition of mankind reveals that man is an enemy of God (Rm. 5:10) as he is hostility toward God (Rm. 8:7). At the same time we saw also in Romans 8:29-30 that those God foreknew and predestined prior to time He called (effectual call) and **justified** in time. We have also seen that being justified is by faith alone,

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Romans 5:1 NASB

This verse plainly teaches us that the result of being justified is peace with God, “... ***having been justified by faith, we have peace with God...***” Since peace with God necessitates reconciliation to God’s own holy nature through the satisfaction of God’s righteous demands expressed in His law, being justified must relate to being right with God.

The Greek word translated *justified* actually comes from the root word for *right* or *righteous*. It must be remembered however, that according to Scripture it is the **ungodly** who God justifies (Rm. 4:5). This verse cannot mean that God makes the ungodly person righteous and then justifies him. If this were the case, the verse would make no sense as it is written. Instead, it would have to read that

God justifies the just or God justifies the righteous and the verse clearly does not say this. Furthermore, if God justified the righteous then justification would be something merited and this would undermine the doctrine of grace alone. Lastly, justifying the righteous would confuse the entire doctrine of righteousness for someone who is already righteous would not be in need of justification. Therefore, justification cannot refer to a person being made righteous. That is, being made righteous in and of him/herself.

Instead, justification is a legal or forensic (pertaining to legal proceedings) term which means to be **declared** right with God. Louis Berkhof defines justification as “*a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner.*”⁴

Differences Between Justification and Sanctification⁵	
Justification	Sanctification
Removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner to all the filial rights involved in his state as a child of God, including an eternal inheritance.	Sanctification removes the pollution of sin and renews the sinner ever increasingly in conformity with the image of God.
Takes place outside the sinner in the tribunal of God, and does not change his inner life, though the sentence is brought home to him subjectively.	Takes place in the inner life of man and gradually affects his whole being.
Takes place once for all. It is not repeated, neither is it a process; it is complete at once and for all time. There is no more or less in justification; man is either fully justified, or he is not justified at all.	Sanctification is a continuous process, which is never completed in this life.
Speaking economically, God the Father is the efficient cause in that He declares the sinner righteous.	Speaking economically, God the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause in that He sanctifies the sinner.

Understanding Faith Alone as the Instrumental Means of Justification

It is *by faith* that the Bible in Romans 5:1 says a person is justified (declared to be righteous before God) and therefore has peace with God.

⁴ Berkhoff, Louis; Systematic Theology, Published by The Banner of Truth, 1958; Reprinted 2005, pg. 513.

⁵ Data in the table is compiled from Louis Berkhoff’s Systematic theology, Published by The Banner of Truth, 1958; Reprinted 2005, pg.513-514.

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Because the Bible says justification is **by faith**, faith is therefore the instrumental means of justification. It is the instrument through which God’s elect are justified. Faith is both an instrument of God and the elect. Because faith is God’s gift which accompanies regeneration (Eph. 2:8-9) and it is by faith that God justifies the sinner (Rm. 3:30; and Gal. 3:8) faith is God’s instrument. Faith is also the elects’ instrument, through which they appropriate Christ and His merit (Rm. 4:5; Gal. 2:16). As the means of justification faith does not provide merit of its own, instead, faith as God’s gift ties the believer to the merit of Christ.

Furthermore, Scripture in several instances declares that it is by faith **apart** from any merit in the sinner that a person is justified. Therefore, **justification is by faith alone.**

Romans 3:28 ***“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”***

Romans 4:4-5 ***“Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness...”***

Galatians 2:16 ***“... nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.”***

Galatians 3:11 ***“Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘The righteous man shall live by faith.’”***

Galatians 3:24 ***“Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.”***

The first phrase of Romans 4:16 says, ***“For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace...”*** This phrase plainly teaches that justifying faith is the faith that is in agreement with grace. Since grace is God’s unmerited favor, justifying faith is **not** associated with any merit in or of the one who believes. This faith alone is saving faith, because a faith associated with any intrinsic or earned merit of the one who believes is not a faith which is in accord with grace since grace is God’s unmerited favor.

In Galatians 2:20-21 Paul expounded on the solitary nature of faith in accordance with grace when he wrote,

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the

grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

In verse 21 Paul made it clear that a faith which earns righteousness because of its association with any intrinsic or earned merit of the one who believes (a faith that is not *faith alone*) is a faith that actually nullifies the death of Christ. Such a faith is not a biblical faith and therefore, not saving faith.

Christ Alone (Solus Christus)

As conveyed in Romans 4:16 and other verses, we have been careful to note that justification of the sinner apart from any merit in or of the sinner is by the instrumental means of faith in order for it to be in accord with grace. However, the demand of God’s law for perfect righteousness must be satisfied for a person to be declared just. Therefore, in order for God to declare the sinner just there must be a basis of perfect righteousness upon which the declaration rests. Such righteousness is found in none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ alone is the basis of our justification for it was Christ and His righteousness alone that satisfied the demand of God’s law for perfect righteousness. This is the rest of the message of Romans 5:1,

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

The first phrase of this powerful verse ***“Therefore having been justified by faith”*** communicates that justification is by faith, while the second ***“... we have peace with God...”*** conveys the result of justification, which is being right with God. The third phrase ***“... through our Lord Jesus Christ...”*** informs us of the basis of our justification, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Law’s demand for perfect righteousness, which is absolutely impossible for anyone to attain by one’s own effort is instrumental in leading sinners to Christ so that by faith alone in Christ alone they may be justified. This is the message of Galatians 3:24,

“Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.”

By faith the regenerated sinner looks to Jesus Christ and Christ’s righteousness alone as ground for his justification. In this sense faith is the instrument of the sinner as he recognizes his own unrighteousness and Christ with His righteousness and then by faith takes possession of Jesus and His

righteousness. Therefore, justification does not rest on one's own righteousness (he has none Rm. 3:10) nor does justification rest on faith as faith is the means not the basis of justification. Instead, justification rests on the righteousness of Christ alone.

The reformers referred to this righteousness as an alien righteousness. That is a righteousness that was not of the sinner but of another, Jesus Christ. Scripture denies an intrinsic righteousness on the part of the sinner (Rm. 3:10) and affirms an extrinsic righteousness, that is a righteousness not originating from the sinner but of the savior, Jesus Christ.

It is on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ that God, in the doctrine of justification, declares the sinner righteous. The event of justification is as follows: the regenerated sinner by faith alone looks to Christ and His righteousness alone for forgiveness of sin. God imputes to the believing sinner the righteousness of Christ and declares that sinner righteous before Himself on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone.

By the imputation of Christ's righteousness it is meant that God credits the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner and justifies the sinner by faith (Rm. 4:6; 3:30; Gal. 3:8). Thus, the righteousness possessed by the sinner is not a self originating righteousness; instead, it is Christ's righteousness reckoned to the sinner's account. It is not the sinner being made righteous for God justifies the ungodly (Rm. 4:5) but Christ's righteousness truly being credited to the sinner (Rm. 4:6). This imputation, because it is an element of justification is a once and for all time event (See table under Faith Alone). Therefore, it is not incremental occurring throughout time. Therefore, this crediting of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner results in the forgiveness of all sins past present and future (Rm. 4:7-8).

Christ, The Satisfier of God's Law

According to Romans 8:1-4 the Law is unable to save because of the enmity and inability of the flesh to obey it, "***For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh...***" Working to gain salvation by keeping the Law is a vain effort for at least the following two reasons.

- 1. Original Sin.** Each of us begins life in a negative position with reference to God's law. That is, we do not start out innocent having a clean record. Instead we are condemned from the start. While many may not think we begin this way, this is clearly the message of the Bible. Scripture teaches in Romans 5:12 and its context that in Adam we all became sinners. By God's design Adam was the federal head of all humanity, according to Acts 17:26 we all originate from this one man. He was the first man and as such perfectly represented every human being. Therefore, when Adam sinned we

all sinned and consequently we all died in Adam (See 1 Cor. 15:22 with Rm. 5:12). This is the doctrine known as **original sin**. R. C. Sproul correctly points out that the doctrine of original sin, "...does not refer primarily to the **first** or original sin committed by Adam and Eve. Original sin refers to the **result** of the first sin—the corruption of the human race. Original sin refers to the fallen condition in which we are born." [Emphasis his]⁶

The result of original sin is the presence of intrinsic sin. The Bible specifically informs us that at the very moment of conception we are sinful. Sin is operating in our natures at the moment of conception. Referring to his own sinful condition King David said, "**Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.**" (Ps. 51:5). The Bible does not depict people as going bad at a certain age (the so called age of accountability). Instead, God's Word teaches that man goes astray from the womb (Job 15:14; Ps. 58:3); that he is but a few days old and is full of trouble (Job. 14:1).

A necessary conclusion in the light of the verses associated with the doctrine of original sin is that all people are sinners first by nature. Consequently, since the fall, humanity does not begin life righteous and therefore correct with reference to God's Law but each person begins physical life already under the condemnation of God's Law because of its unrighteous condition.

2. **Sinful Deeds.** But the Bible does not stop with this unrighteous condition when it comes to revealing the futility of attempting to keep the Law of God for salvation. Secondly, Scripture reveals the practical result of being sinners by nature, in that the Bible also presents mankind as being **sinners by deed**.

While it is generally assumed that people become sinners because of the sinful things they do, Scripture, as we saw in the previous point says different. Man sins because it is his nature to sin and therefore, sin he does. Simply put, because humanity is sinful by nature it is sinful by deed. After birth people sin because it is their intrinsic nature to sin. Through unrighteous deeds they regularly exhibit their fallen unrighteous nature. So much so the Bible says, "**There is none who does good, there is not even one.**" (Rm. 3:12) Mankind, because of his fallen unrighteous nature is unable to keep the holy Law of God. No matter how hard he may attempt to keep the Law of God his own daily violations of that Law stand as constant

⁶ Sproul, R. C., *Essential Truths Of The Christian Faith*; Tyndale House Publishers, INC.; Wheaton, IL. © 1992 by R.C. Sproul, Pg. 145.

evidence against him, highlighting his unrighteousness. The Law of God demands perfection but man at his best is imperfect and can only deliver imperfection. His sins reveal he falls short of the glory of the holiness of God (Rm. 3:23).

However, what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did by sending His Son as an offering for sin. Thus, Jesus satisfied the righteous requirement of God's holy Law (Rm. 8:3-4) by His death on the cross. So fulfilled in Christ by His death was the righteous requirement of the Law that those in Christ are no longer under the condemnation of the Law (Rm. 8:1-2) having the righteousness of Christ reckoned to them.

In 1 John 2:1 John refers to Jesus as *Jesus Christ the righteous* and completing this statement in the next verse writes, "... *and is the propitiation for our sins...*" As the propitiation for our sins by His death on the cross Christ received the wrath of God due us because of our sin by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). By this Jesus willfully satisfied the righteous demand of the Law and appeased God's wrath on our behalf.

This propitiatory sacrifice was carried out with reference to things pertaining to God (Heb. 2:17). God the Father willfully gave the Son for this purpose (1 Jn. 4:10). He was pleased to pour His wrath on Christ to ultimately display His glory (Is. 53:10; Rm. 3:21-30). Christ willfully gave His life for this purpose (Jn. 10:18) through the eternal Spirit (Hb. 9:14); thus, the Father was satisfied (Is. 53:11a) in what the Godhead had worked together to accomplish (2 Cor. 5:19). Therefore, the many are justified (Is. 53:11b; Mt. 20:28) on the basis of Christ's atoning work by which He obtained eternal redemption (Hb. 9:14) on behalf of those given to Him by the Father (Jn. 6:37, 39; 10:11, 14-18).

Multiple times over the Bible clearly proclaims that God is pleased in Christ and takes pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him and through His death to have reconciled His people to Himself in order to present them before Him holy blameless and beyond reproach (Mt. 3:17; 17:5; Col. 1:16-22). Christ alone is the basis of our justification. According to Paul, anything besides Christ or in addition to Christ nullifies the grace of God (Gal. 2:21) and renders Christ's death needless. To add something to Christ as a basis for justification is to diminish from Him. To diminish from Christ is to reject God's plan of redemption and thus reject God entirely. In Christ's own words recorded in John 14:6, He alone is the basis of salvation, "*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.'*"

Summary

It was not man's merit that satisfied God's Law. It was Christ's merit! As we have seen, man is sinful from his conception and displays this by a life of sin. The natural man does not merit God's grace of forgiveness intrinsically and he cannot earn any merit as his ongoing sinful deeds serve as a constant reminder

that he remains under the curse of God's Law (Gal. 3:10). But the good news of the Gospel is that Christ satisfied God's Law. Therefore, when a person believes by faith alone (apart from works) in Christ alone as the sole basis of his/her salvation (Gal. 2:16, 20-21), God reckons (imputes) the righteousness of Christ to that person's account so that that sinner stands before God clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. In a real sense Christ has become to the one who is in Christ, his righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). On this basis and this basis alone the believing sinner is seen as just before God. Such a person stands forgiven of all sin past, present and future as Christ's righteousness, having been charged to his account, has washed him/her from all sin (Rm. 4:5-8; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5).

Scripture Alone (Sola Scriptura)

The doctrine associated with the phrase, *Scripture Alone* pertains to the Word of God being the only infallible authority for faith and practice. This doctrine was dramatically exemplified on April 18, 1521 when for a second time and second day in a row Martin Luther appeared at the Diet of Worms.⁷ There, he was asked to either defend all his writings or disavow some parts of them. For in his writings Luther had clearly and specifically condemned those practices and proclamations of the Roman Catholic Church and its Popes which could not be supported by Scripture.

Luther responded explaining his writings contained three classifications: The first was for edification of the faithful, advancement of piety and improvement of manners, to which even his enemies agreed. The second was that which pertained to his attacks on the papacy and their corruptions. The third classification was his attack on his theological adversaries. He renounced none of these.

Believing his answer elusive, the court told Luther to provide a straight answer "without horns." To which Luther replied that he would provide an

⁷ In German the title is *Reichstag zu Worms*. Reichstag is literally "day of the state" and refers to a deliberative assembly. The word *diet* can refer to a legislative assembly in various countries or the assembly of estates of the former Holy Roman Empire (Dictionary.com). The meeting took place in Worms Germany. The assembly was held from January 28, 1521 to May 25, 1521. Martin Luther's trial was one element of the assembly. Martin arrived in Worms on April 16, 1521 following a 300 mile 10 day trip from Wittenberg which included preaching at various cities along the way. He appeared in trial on April 17 and then on the 18th after which his trial concluded.

answer “with neither horns nor teeth.”⁸ In two languages (German and Latin), Luther responded with, *“Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I can not and will not recant any thing, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do any thing against the conscience.”*⁹

Martin Luther’s response was clear. His conscience was bound in the Word of God. To Martin Luther it was Scripture and Scripture alone which held the sole authority to bind his or for that matter, any one’s conscience. Thus, he rejected as a binding agent on his conscience the authority of the Roman Catholic Church with its erroneous self contradicting teachings created and espoused by its various Popes councils and traditions. Individually as well as collectively, he saw these lacked the authority necessary to render them as binding on the conscience.

While Luther’s response exemplified the doctrine of Scripture alone and was instrumental in galvanizing the reformation, neither Luther nor the reformation is the basis for standing on the authority of Scripture alone. Instead, it is the Word of God that declares its self as the only authority for faith and practice.

Prior to examining verses from Scripture which address this subject let’s briefly consider three points:

1. What is meant by the phrase “bind the conscience.”
2. What is meant by the phrase “Scripture alone.”
3. What the phrase “Scripture alone” does not mean.

1. What is meant by the phrase “bind the conscience.”

First, consider the word *bind*. Depending on the context the word *bind* can have various meanings. For instance, if we are talking about books being bound we are usually referring to the kind of material used for covering a book, e.g.,

⁸ From Schaff’s History of the Church, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 1999, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved. Luther’s Testimony before the Diet. In the German text, *“ein unstüssige und unbeissige Antwort”* (vol. LXIV. 382); i.e., an answer neither offensive nor biting - with reference, no doubt, to his concluding warning.

⁹ Ibid. Other sources for Luther’s trial, <http://www.luther.de/en/worms.html>; <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/frtrial/luther/lutheraccount.html>; http://www.k.state.edu/english/baker/english233/Luther-Diet_of_Worms.htm; <http://www.christian-history.org/diet-of-worms.html>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diet_of_Worms

leather, paper, hard cover or soft or even the method used to hold the pages in the book e.g., glue, staples, thread, wire, etc. In the medical field a doctor or nurse may bind up a wound with bandages. When we sign a contract we bind ourselves to the terms of the contract. Traffic laws bind us as they place us under certain obligations regarding how we operate our vehicles on the street. In a sense our behavior in the driver's seat is regulated by these laws as they establish the parameters for safely operating a vehicle. We could say that our operation of a motor vehicle on the street is bound by traffic laws.

Now consider the conscience. The conscience is that inborn operation of the human mind by which we judge between right and wrong and consequently act accordingly. The conscience is to the soul in a moral sense what the nervous system is to the body in a physical sense. Just as the body's nervous system alerts the body to physical pain or pleasure, the properly informed conscience alerts the soul to that which is right or wrong (Heb. 5:14). Furthermore, just as the nervous system alerts the body to physical injury and the need for medical attention, the properly informed conscience alerts the soul to guilt and the need for forgiveness (Rm. 2:15).

Therefore, when we are talking about *binding the conscience* we are addressing the subject of what it is that has the authority to govern (bind) our conscience in such a way so as to regulate our behavior (thoughts and actions) in regard to faith and practice. As Christians we could say that *binding the conscience* speaks to the means or manner by which our consciences are governed so as to regulate our behavior as slaves of our Master, Jesus Christ. In the form of a question we might then ask, what has the authority to so govern (bind) our conscience so that in our actions we might please our Master Who is none other than God in the flesh? The simple and most logical answer to this question is none other than God's very Word as contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

2. What is meant by the phrase "Scripture alone."

The phrase *Scripture alone* is used to convey that it is the Word of God alone which has the authority to govern (bind) the Christian's conscience in matters of faith and practice. In short, Scripture is the only rule of faith for every believer and therefore the only rule of faith for all of God's people.

3. What the phrase "Scripture alone" does not mean.

Regarding what *Scripture alone* does not mean I will refer to comments from James White¹⁰ who commenting on what *Scripture alone* does not mean gives the following four points,

¹⁰ <http://vintage.aomin.org/SANTRAN.html>,

First of all, it is not a claim that the Bible contains all knowledge. The Bible is not exhaustive in every detail. John 21:25 speaks to the fact that there are many things that Jesus said and did that are not recorded in John, or in fact in any book in the world because the whole books of the world could not contain it. But the Bible does not have to be exhaustive to function as the sole rule of faith for the Church. We do not need to know the color of Thomas' eyes. We do not need to know the menu of each meal of the Apostolic band for the Scriptures to function as the sole rule of faith for the Church.

Secondly, it is not a denial of the Church's authority to teach God's truth. I Timothy 3:15 describes the Church as "the pillar and foundation of the truth." The truth is in Jesus Christ and in His Word. The Church teaches truth and calls men to Christ and, in so doing, functions as the pillar and foundation thereof. The Church does not add revelation or rule over Scripture. The Church being the bride of Christ, listens to the Word of Christ, which is found in God-breathed Scripture.

Thirdly, it is not a denial that God's Word has been spoken. Apostolic preaching was authoritative in and of itself. Yet, the Apostles proved their message from Scripture, as we see in Acts 17:2, and 18:28, and John commended those in Ephesus for testing those who claimed to be Apostles, Revelation 2:2. The Apostles were not afraid to demonstrate the consistency between their teaching and the Old Testament.

And, finally, sola scriptura is not a denial of the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and enlightening the Church."

Scripture on "Scripture Alone"

The Bible asserts its sufficiency to alone bind the conscience.

"¹⁹ And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."

Isaiah 8:19-20 NASB

In Isaiah 8:19 the Bible conveys the certainty of the temptation for the people of God to turn from the Word of God and consult the world's counselors regarding spiritual matters. Note the text says not "if" but "when they say..." The world offers a variety of authorities regarding matters pertaining to faith and this is interesting seeing the world does not possess faith. It becomes more interesting when one considers the fact that generally, the world would even denounce the use of counselors who have no experience, yet in this matter of

faith, of which they have no experience, they offer up a multitude of so called authorities.

Some of those counselors in Isaiah's day were mediums and spiritists who claimed to be able to counsel the living by consulting the dead. Isaiah commented on the foolishness of such a practice when he asked, "***Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?***"

Then Isaiah stated the genuine authority, "***To the law and the testimony...***" Specifically, this phrase is a reference to the Word of God as revealed through Moses and God's prophets. In Luke 24:27 The Holy Spirit used the parallel phrase "***Moses and with all the prophets***" as a synonym for all the Scripture, which according to 2 Tim. 3:15 is from God.

According to Isaiah 8:20 information pertaining to faith and practice that does not come from the Word of God does not come from God but from those who possess no light. Such counsel comes from darkness. Therefore, it does not have the authority to bind one's conscience before God. Of Isaiah 8:20 John Calvin wrote,

*"Hence we learn that everything which is added to the word must be condemned and rejected. It is the will of the Lord that we shall depend wholly on his word, and that our knowledge shall be confined within its limits; and therefore, if we lend our ears to others, we take a liberty which he has forbidden, and offer to him a gross insult. Everything that is introduced by men on their own authority will be nothing else than a corruption of the word; and consequently, if we wish to obey God, we must reject all other instructors."*¹¹

Much more subtle than that temptation which Isaiah spoke of is the temptation to allow religious tradition to bind the conscience. Jesus addressed this with the religious leaders of His day in Matthew 15:1-9 NASB,

¹ Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, ² "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." ³ And He answered and said to them, "And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.' ⁵ "But you say, 'Whoever shall say to his father or mother,' Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God," ⁶ he is not to honor his father or his

¹¹ Calvin's Commentaries, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database
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mother.' And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ⁸ 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. ⁹ 'But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

The nature of religious tradition is that it sounds and even appears religious, ***"This people honors me with their lips."*** The religious leaders of Christ's day were the Pharisees and scribes. Scribes, who were often Pharisees, acted somewhat like religious lawyers in reference to spiritual matters. Sadly, these individuals had elevated the traditions of men, religious though those traditions might have been, to a place equivalent to the Word of God. Christ denounced such a practice and in the context of this encounter taught that the traditions of men are not binding on one's conscience before God.

In our own day we are blessed with genuinely rich historical post biblical witnesses to biblical faith such as various church traditions, counsels, creeds, confessions, catechisms and other statements of faith. Nevertheless, though many of these may be true in part or whole, these witnesses are not themselves to be elevated to the point of binding the conscience. When they are elevated to a point of binding the conscience, they become competitors of truth instead of conveyors of truth.

Responding to the Sadducees, who constituted another religious sect of His day, Jesus said,

"... You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God."

Matthew 22:29 NASB

The context of this response was that of a challenge put to Christ by the Sadducees who denied the resurrection (Mt. 22:23). Jesus silenced them (22:34) by demonstrating that their error was in the fact that they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. Here Christ elevated the Word of God over man's reasoning and showed that when one's mind is not bound by the Word of God with reference to things pertaining to faith, such a one errors.

Note that Jesus did not add anything to the Scriptures except to refer to the power of God. In essence, the Sadducees' ignorance of God's Word left them ignorant of God's power. God's Word and His Word alone is the authority.

The Bible clearly proclaims its own sufficiency when it comes to preparing God's people to live a godly life. As such the Bible is the only rule of faith for the believer.

“¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NASB

Enough cannot be said about the power of this verse as it conveys the sufficiency of the Word of God to equip the people of God. 2 Timothy is the last letter of the Apostle Paul. Shortly after writing this epistle Paul was executed by the Roman Emperor Nero. Aware that his time was short and that at any moment he would be executed (4:6) Paul wrote the epistle to Timothy, his son in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2 and 2 Tim. 1:2). Specifically, Paul wrote it to instruct Timothy regarding his ministry in the last days (3:1-4:8). If there was another or even an additional source to which the Christian should look for instruction in regard to matters of faith and practice this would have been the place in the Word of God to add it. But there is nothing mentioned here but Scripture and it is Scripture and Scripture alone that Paul conveyed to Timothy as being from God and therefore, *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

Paul referred Timothy to no other resource than that of Scripture and furthermore, in 4:1-2 charged Timothy to preach Scripture. He did not charge Timothy to preach religious tradition,¹² the philosophies of the world or for that matter anything else but the Word of God for it is the Word of God alone that has the authority to bind the conscience of the person of God and thus equip him/her for a life of godliness.

The Blessing of the Binding

Generally speaking, the word *bind* has negative connotations in our society today. This is because we live in a culture that seems to misunderstand freedom or liberty. Today freedom and liberty are often understood and defined as a life without restraints. While this definition may to some extent be okay when used in reference to the tyranny of a totalitarian form of civil government, it is certainly not a statement which should be applied to every aspect of life.

Think about our bodies again and the danger of applying this definition of freedom to our nervous system which acts as a binding agent in our bodies. One

¹² Some have attempted to twist Paul’s words in 2 Tim 2:2, *“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* along with Paul’s references to tradition in 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15 and 3:6 to say that traditions are also valid authorities for binding the conscience. However, in these references Paul is simply referring to God’s Word and the practice of it.

of its many functions is to alert the body to dangers by the use of painful notifications. As such it limits us from certain forms of behavior, e.g., holding fire or hot objects in our bare hands or failing to seek medical advice when we experience chronic pain. Should this aspect of the system fail or be dulled the consequences could be fatal. Those living under the philosophy of the previously mentioned definition of freedom might view such a loss as good, since one would be liberated from pain. However, only someone ignorant of the importance of the nervous system's painful notifications would want to apply such a definition here. Those who understand the important function of the nervous system to notify by painful impulses know that such impulses are instrumental in alerting to injury and the need for treatment or even preventing injury altogether. So while in one sense the nervous system of the body is restrictive, it is at the same time in another sense liberating.

The philosophy that freedom or liberty is a life with no restraints is even more dangerous when applied to the conscience. Just as an unhealthy nervous system can result in severe physical damage to the body, even death, a misinformed or ignored conscience has severe negative consequences to the soul. For this reason it is imperative that one's conscience be **correctly** informed.

Those who enjoy their sin or simply do not want the sense of guilt or both will negatively view God's law as restrictive or even oppressive. Because man's wisdom minimizes sin and its consequences to include guilt and judgment, those applying to the conscience the philosophy that freedom or liberty is a life without restraints opt for the wisdom of men. These end up with a false sense of liberty.

On the other hand, when the Word of God exposes sin and reveals a person's guilt (Rm. 3:20; 7:7-9; Gal. 2:19) it also points that person to the savior for forgiveness and thus a cleansed conscience before God (Gal. 3:22-24; Hb. 9:14; 10:22). Therefore, a conscience calibrated to the standard of the Word of God (Ps. 19:7-14; Hb. 4:12) as opposed to the wisdom of man experiences true freedom. Jesus put it this way,

“If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:31b-32 NASB

The principle in Christ's words is straight forward. The Greek word translated abide is *ménō* which means “to stay in a place,” figuratively speaking it means

“to remain in a sphere.”¹³ In this usage it means to remain or continue in the Word of God. The person who remains in God’s Word will know God’s truth (Compare Jn. 17:17) and the truth of God’s Word will set that person free.¹⁴ No wonder James twice referred to Scripture as the perfect law of liberty (Jm. 1:25; 2:12). A conscience bound by Scripture alone is a free conscience.

Glory to God Alone (Soli Deo Gloria)

Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God Alone) speaks specifically to the ultimate purpose of the four previous solas of the Gospel. When we talk of God’s glory we are talking about the incomprehensible weight of Who God is. To speak of God’s glory is to speak of the excellence of His character, the greatness of His being and the perfection of all that He is.

In the Old Testament God manifested the greatness of his glorious being using magnificent displays of creation such as brilliant light, fire and smoke (Ex. 34:29; 1 Kgs. 8:11 with 2 Chron. 7:1-3); a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21 with 16:10). These things and others God used to speak of His glory. The writer of the book of Hebrews likely had these in mind when he wrote,

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways...”

Then he went on to say,

“... in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...”

Hebrews 1:1-3 NASB

Truly Christ is the radiance of God’s glory. John wrote in 1:14,

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

¹³ From Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, abridged edition, (Kittel 1 vol.) Copyright © 1985 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

¹⁴ Note the fact that Jesus added nothing to the Word of God.

When Moses asked of God to see His glory God replied by linking directly to that request His goodness as existing in His grace and mercy. And truly we have beheld the glory of God in Christ by seeing in Christ God's great grace and mercy Thus, the purpose of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, is to bear witness to the glory of God. In essence, salvation, from beginning to end is God's work and therefore testifies to God's glory alone.

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:36 NASB

While the redemption experience of each sinner speaks to the immediate purpose in the death of Christ for He did indeed come into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), the overarching theme of redemption is that of God's glory. In Ephesians 1, where God's saving grace toward the elect is shown to have existed before time (v. 4); where it is said that grace was manifested in time through the death of Christ (v. 7); where the Bible says the message of the truth of the Gospel was heard and people believed it (v. 13); and believing it, were sealed and given a pledge of their inheritance (v. 14), the Bible, three times, declares the purpose behind the great message of redemption in the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

Ephesians 1:5-6 NASB

“...to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

Ephesians 1:12 NASB

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Ephesians 1:13-14 NASB

For what purpose or to what end is redemption? To God's glory and to God's glory alone!!! No glory to the saved sinner because the salvation possessed is not in any way of the sinner. Instead, his salvation is according to the unmerited favor (grace) of God. Therefore, the praise is to the glory of God and His grace (v. 6). The sinner's salvation rests on the redemption that is secured in and by Jesus Christ the Son, to the end that the saved sinner, sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise would be to the praise of Christ's glory (vs. 7-14).

In God's eternal plan salvation is not nor was it ever intended to be an end in itself. Although in salvation the condemned helpless ungodly vile enemy of God (Rm. 5:6-10) is forgiven reconciled and renewed, it is not this condition, wonderful though it is, that is the final or ultimate purpose for salvation.¹⁵ Instead, the salvation of a sinner in the redemptive work of God was, has always been and will always remain a testimony to a greater end, the glory of God as He, through the work He performs in them, makes known the riches of His glory.

“And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.”

Romans 9:23-24 NASB

Salvation is therefore all about God and His glorious grace, the saved sinner is merely incidental in the great scheme of redemption. Salvation is the evidence of God's superior love in that He loved a useless (Rm. 3:12), helpless, ungodly, sinful, angry (Rm. 8:7) enemy who was subject to God's wrath (Rm. 5:9). He sent His only begotten Son into the world to willingly (Jn. 10:17-18) die on behalf of that enemy (Rm. 5:6-10). Christ's death, which is the basis of salvation, testifies to the intensity of God's holiness (Ps. 5:4; Is. 6:3; Rv. 4:8) as He compromised neither His holiness nor His own justice to accomplish His purpose but met the strictest demand of His justice by paying the only payment sufficient to meet such a demand, His holy Son (Rm. 8:1-4). Salvation testifies to the great power of God as in salvation God frees His enemy from sin's bondage, forgives the offender, reconciles him to Himself and having changed him/her into a new creation, that person willfully, through God's strength, lives no longer for self but for God Whom he/she formerly opposed and to His glory which he formerly despised.¹⁶

Redemption bears witness to the glorious unity of the trinity in that all three members of the Godhead worked to fulfill God's plan (Heb. 9:14). Before

¹⁵ It is worth noting the parallel in the book of Ezekiel between Israel's turning their attention from God to themselves and the departing of the glory of God from Jerusalem (Ezk. 8:3-4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23). Israel turned their attention to what God had made them become. Forgetting His purpose in making them who they were (Compare Is. 43:21), they saw themselves as the end and trusted in their beauty, the very beauty God had made them become (Ezk. 16:1-22). In the New Testament the churches of Sardis and Laodicea commit a similar sin to Israel's (See Rv. 3:1 and 14-22).

¹⁶ Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Philippians 2:12-13

creation ever existed the Father chose in Christ a people for Himself (Eph. 1:4). He gave them to Christ (Jn. 6:37, 39). In time the Father sent His Son Jesus to give His life for His sheep (Jn. 10:15). On the cross through the eternal Spirit Jesus offered Himself without blemish to God (Heb. 9:14) and thereby obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). The Holy Spirit, on the basis of Christ's death causes God's elect to be born again (Jn. 3:1-8) and works in their lives to renew each of them to the image of Christ (Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:2). And what is the purpose of conforming each believer into the image of Jesus? Is this the end in itself? No. The purpose in conforming the elect (Rm. 8:33) to the image of Jesus is so that Christ might be the first born among many brethren (Rm. 8:29). This is to demonstrate the preeminence of Christ (Col. 1:15-20).

Although, the phrase "glory to God alone" is generally discussed in relation to redemption it is by no means limited to redemption. It is the answer to the great question, "Why?" or "What is everything about?" This sola encompasses absolutely everything. In Isaiah 6 the angels declared that the whole earth is full of God's glory (6:3). David wrote, "...in His temple everything says, "glory!" (Ps. 29:9). Romans 1:20 informs us that the invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature of God have been manifested through the creation. So evident are these in the creation that mankind is without excuse in his failure to worship God. From the principle "glory to God alone" we gain understanding of what life is about for God's glory is the reason for which all exists. Because this sola conveys God's purpose in all that has ever and will ever transpire it provides the ultimate purpose for all we do (1 Cor. 10:31). Therefore, this sola stands as the great sign post in the life of every believer directing us through every trial and triumph giving profound significance to what would otherwise be mundane and mediocre. Consequently, we can set our course on God's glory knowing we will not be let down. Thus, this sola provides hope to the people of God for God will vindicate His great name (Ezk. 36:23; Is. 60:21; 61:3) and as a result God's people will not be disappointed (Dt. 32:36).

"Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in! Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah."

Psalms 24:9-10 NASB

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