

ALONE : SOLI DEO GLORIA

For the next five weeks, we will look at five principles that were articulated during the Protestant Reformation.¹ These are known as the ‘**Five Solae / Solas**’: in Latin, these are **Sola Scriptura, Sola fide, Sola gratia, Solus Christus (or Solo Christo) and Soli Deo Gloria**. In English, these are: Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone, Christ alone (or through Christ alone) and glory to God alone. It seems ironic, that in a time of social isolation, that our theme is the word: ‘alone’. In a time when ‘tolerance’ is a priority, the word ‘alone’ communicates that we hold certain things to be fundamental to our salvation. These issues firstly impact what we believe. However, they also must impact how we live out our faith, including our words and actions. Also, as we have conversations with people from other faith traditions, these will inevitably impact how we share our faith. **Today, we are looking at ‘Glory to God alone’.**

GETTING STARTED: The Westminster Shorter Catechism starts with the words: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God ...”² Read the following verses. Then consider: what things impede or stand in the way of you making God’s glory, the central motivation in your life? What do the verses from Isaiah 48 imply, about what happens when God’s people go their own way and sin? What does God think, when he is put second?

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Ps 19:1-4 NRSV)

LORD, we show our trust in you by obeying your laws; our heart’s desire is to glorify your name. (Is 26:8 NLT)

For my name’s sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, so that I may not cut you off. See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for why should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. (Is 48:9-11 NRSV)

- ❗ In Ps 19, we read that creation – including the heavens, sun, moon and stars - declares the glory of God. John Piper highlights that God’s passion for his own glory is a recurrent theme through Scripture.³ Others note that ‘the Glory of God’ is a theme that permeates the book of Revelation, especially in declaring God’s holiness and incomparability.⁴ From the start to the end of Scripture, we see that God had an inbuilt purpose for creation, to bring glory to Himself and that God is jealous when we give glory to any ‘idols’ that we set up in His place. We read that it is the role of the people of God, to bring glory to God, in all that we do and all that we say.

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23 – 11:1

🗨️ What things stood out for you, from the sermon this week?

🗨️ Steve highlighted that Paul had taught about the incredible freedom that we have in Christ, including being free from having to work for our salvation, the requirement to have a specific racial or cultural background to be right with God, needing to follow certain traditions and the burden of complying with Old Testament law. We are free from condemnation, from the stain of sin and the chains/ shackles of death. What is it, about your freedom in Christ, that you celebrate most? How has this changed your life?

- ❗ It is helpful to go back, when you have a chance, and read this passage in the context of 1 Corinthians 8-10, where Paul had firstly talked about issues around ‘Food Offered to Idols’ and then about ‘The Rights of an Apostle.’ The Corinthian church was forging an identity within a city where idolatry was rife and the meat market included meat that had previously been used in pagan sacrifices. Paul highlighted that eating this meat, in and of itself, wasn’t the issue. “We are no worse off if we do not (eat the meat) and no better off if we do.” (1 Cor 8:8) Consideration of others in each situation is tantamount. Similarly, Paul highlighted that, as an apostle who had seen Christ, he was both “free” and had “rights”. However, he made deliberate decisions to not exercise his “rights”, so as to not “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” and “so that I might win more of them.” (1 Cor 9:12,19)

🗨️ The passage starts with the words “All things are lawful / permissible” but not all things are beneficial ... not all things build up. (ie are constructive). We could use the example and say, “we’re permitted and legally allowed to drive at 80 km/h on most parts of the Great Western Highway”, but that’s not always the optimal way to drive. In what situations would you drive at a lower speed?

¹ <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/the-five-solas-of-the-protestant-reformation.html>

² <https://www.opc.org/documents/SCLayout.pdf>

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-passion-for-his-glory--2>

⁴ <https://spreadingthefame.com/2012/11/05/theology-of-the-glory-of-god-from-the-book-of-revelation/>

☝ What would motivate you to change your driving behaviour? What might be the consequences if you chose to ignore the prevailing traffic conditions / situation and chose to exercise your 'rights'?

☝ In 1 Cor 10:24, Paul highlights a motive behind some Corinthians making a choice to exercise their 'rights'. What is this motive? What does Paul offer, as an alternative motivation?

❗ Ben Witherington III highlights that we see in this passage, that the apostle Paul had obviously gone on a personal journey and done some deep reflection about this issue of whether to eat meat that was sold in the meat market. He had come to the conclusion that "it is just food". His younger (Orthodox Jewish) self would never have uttered the words that he now gives to the Corinthian church:

"One should, Paul says, buy and eat whatever is sold in the market without inquiring because of conscience (v. 25). Inquiring because of conscience is precisely what a Jew would do, and this shows how far Paul had come from his days as a zealous Pharisee. He no longer felt it necessary to keep kosher since all creatures and thus all meat are the Lord's and thus one may freely share in it. There may be some irony in Paul's use of Ps. 24:1 here since this passage was used by the rabbis to argue that one must say the blessing over each meal, a blessing that they would say only over kosher food."⁵

☝ Different people are at different stages in their Christian journey and in working through different issues. They may change their minds for some reason. For example: one friend had strong views about whether it was permissible for a Christian to remarry after divorce. After her marriage suddenly ended, she did some solid Bible study and wrestled with this issue. What are some of the "grey areas" where Christians tend to disagree? In what way can we help each other work through issues, without causing each other to 'stumble'?

❗ If we are missional people, we're inevitably going to end up eating with non-Christians who share their food with us. However, when we go into situations where we're out of our comfort zone, there's a real possibility that something might occur, that we're not prepared for, so make a decision on the fly.

"In v. 27 Paul deals with a real situation, as *ei* ("if") which the indicative verb indicates. When an unbeliever invites Christians to dinner in his home and they decide to go, they are simply to eat what is set before them. By contrast in v. 28 we have *ean* ("if perhaps") with a subjunctive verb: "But if perhaps anyone may say...." Here Paul is dealing with a hypothetical possibility, one that his audience has not asked about. ... (if) the host was trying to be sensitive to the Christian's religious persuasion and perhaps had assumed that Christians, adherents of some sort of derivative form of Judaism, would like Jews not partake of such food. In such a circumstance, if one would go ahead and eat, then the host would see that as a violation of one's own religion. It would be a bad witness to that person. So Paul says to abstain for the pagan's sake so as to uphold a good image of moral consistency in the pagan's eyes."⁶

☝ In this sort of situation, we are to act out of consideration for the other person's conscience, not our own. "For why should my liberty be subject to the judgement of someone else's conscience." (1 Cor 10:29) What might be a modern-day equivalent situation? Eg In what way might we limit our freedom, in order to avoid offending others or to try to stop others seeing Christians as hypocrites?

APPLICATION: Paul summed up this section, with the mandate to follow his example and "Imitate Christ!" This week: put a poster on the fridge door with the words: **Do everything for the glory of God.**

Read the following verses together:

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do everything for the glory of God.** ³² **Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,** ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, **not seeking my own advantage,** but that of many, **so that they may be saved.** ¹ **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.** (1 Cor 10:31-11:1 NRSV)

☝ HEAD – Reflect on: What does it mean for me to imitate Christ?

♥ HEART – Reflect on: What motivates me in what I do and what priorities I have? Is "glorifying God" and living '**for God's glory alone**' a priority for me? Is the salvation of others a priority? Or it "seeking my own advantage" what really motivates me and consumes my time and energy?

☝ HANDS – What changes need to occur in my behaviour, speech and other actions, so that I do not offend others, either in the church or outside, nor detract from glorifying God?

⁵ Witherington, B., III. (1995). *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p226-227.

⁶ Witherington, B., III. (1995). *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p227-228.