

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We worship together at Gillespie as a reformed church. Many of you may know what this means and maybe others not. At it's simplest it means we are part of a denomination that came about through the period of the Reformation which was a period of time where priests and theologians challenged the Roman Church in its theology. It rose in Europe, arguably first with Jan Hus (1342-1415: Bohemia-Czech) and grew in depths and reach with Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531: Switzerland), Martin Luther (1483-1546: Germany), Jean Calvin (1509 -1564: France/Geneva). At the same time the English Reformation under Henry VIII led to a split from the Roman Church, the submission of the clergy, the dissolution of monasteries and the formation of the Anglican Church. Scotland's most influential reformer was the notary-priest, John Knox (1514-1572) who was influenced by Calvin, and it is these great men of the faith who were influential in the foundational theology of the reformed church. But what is that theology based upon and why is it important?

Our sole understanding of God should be found in the Bible alone, but there are other works that can help us understand the application of God's work, theologically, in our lives today. When you hear the word theology, you may think this is only something for clergy or that it simply isn't of interest. But theology should be for every Christian, for it is simply 'faith seeking understanding'. It is your faith seeking and understanding who God is and what is your relationship to Him.

To help us as a fellowship of Jesus Christ, this year I will write each month on some basics points of the reformed faith, starting with the *five-solas*. Although the *five-solas* were not used as 'slogans' by the reformers, they capture well the emphasis of the teaching and preaching of the Reformation and are anchor points for our faith today. Ultimately the Reformation was about the recovery of the Gospel for everyone, away from an elite who read Latin, and prescribed the

worship and forgiveness of God. So, I will give a broad overview of each sola, praying your hearts will be set alight to go deeper, so bringing you closer to the Lord in understanding His way for your life.

The Five-Solas are: Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone); Solus Christus (Christ Alone); Sola Gratia (Grace Alone); Sola Fide (Faith Alone); Soli Deo Gloria (Glory of God Alone).

### **SOLA SCRIPTURA**

A principle of the Reformation was the provision to all people, in their own language, the word of God found in the Scriptures of the Holy Bible in the Old and New Testament. This was important because what God has said in and through His written word is the gauge against which every doctrine is measured.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, agreed by the Assembly of Divines, approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647 is our subordinate standard and states of Holy Scripture nature, creation and providence in themselves...

*are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation: **therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in diverse manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary:***

The 'divines' recognised the primacy of Scripture and the fact that most confessions of faith tended to start with a doctrine of Scripture confirms the confessional matter that **our understanding of God starts with Scripture alone AND also has full authority over humans** rather than traditions of the church or positions of people within the church and their influence on doctrine. Richard A. Muller in 'Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics' says that Scripture, namely **the books of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation are:**

*'The sole foundation of theology and, hence, the source of the*

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- **PRAYER:** please pray for opportunities to change lives for Jesus?
- **PEOPLE:** please offer some time in serving your church community?
- **POUNDS:** please make a regular offering to the work of your church?

*exegetically (critical explanation or analysis) elicited truths from which theological and soteriological (doctrine of salvation) goals could be drawn'.*

To clarify, Muller is stating that theology (the study and understanding of God) and our relationship to and with him, is derived from the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments. The truth of our lives and the life hereafter are found in the Bible, and in order to find THE truth you cannot depend on human wisdom or upon 'your truth', but only depend upon the truth of the Word of God in the Bible.

Do you believe that? **Can you hang your life on the word of God?**

There are two things that a Christian must hang on to in understanding the word of God, and it is that the Scripture has authority and that it is sufficient.

H.B. Charles Jr, Pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church of Jacksonville states '*by what authority do we know truth? By what authority do we understand God, and by what authority do we defend the Bible? Only by God's word is perfect revelation which carries the authority of God Himself in it*'. In other words the Bible is the place where we find authoritative truth for our life and ministry in the kingdom come and yet to come because they are God's inspired word and therefore inerrant authority is found in them. But the Scriptures are not just the authority on all truth, they are all sufficient, meaning the word of God is enough. It provides believers with all truth needed for salvation and for following Jesus. It states in the Westminster Confession...

*The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary*



*consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.*

Sola scriptura still matters today, because the authority and the sufficiency of the Bible has been and remains under question from outside the church and within the church. It is why I draw your attention for Christian's to value the Scriptures and ask of you to rely on it, seek wisdom from it, pray through it and study it. For as you do so, God will reveal Himself to you and His call for you. I hope also He confirms in you an understanding to trust in the Bible's authority and sufficiency.

A couple of verse from Scripture...

*"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1.v-8)*

*Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. (Psalm 1.v2)*

*...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8.v3b)*

This last verse was used against Satan's temptation in the desert. A life without the word of God is a life without Jesus and in my eyes a life not worth living. Sola Scriptura matters... I commend it to you!

Your servant in Christ, *Pastor Mike* (Minister, GMC)

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