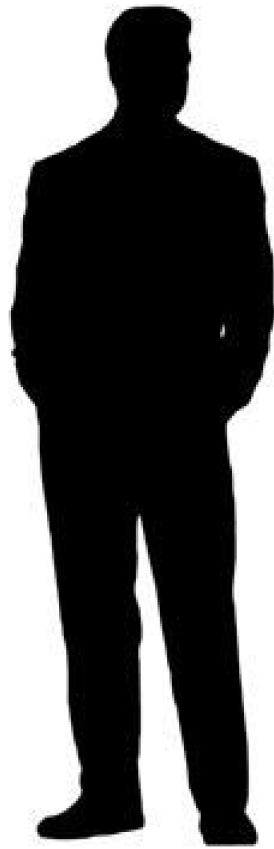


# Five Sacred Solos





# Five sacred solos

by Brian Johnston





# 1. Sola scriptura

## - only the Bible!

The title of this booklet – Five Sacred Solos – refers to five things that stand alone. Not just things, but great truths or teachings. They were discovered (or perhaps rediscovered) at the time known as the Reformation period in Europe, mostly in the sixteenth century. A renewed interest in the study of the Bible had brought them to light.

The first and fundamental truth was then known in Latin as *sola scriptura* – or 'by scripture alone'. The word 'scripture' meant the Bible as the Word of God.

For centuries before this point in time, the clergy or churchmen had claimed to have authority in spiritual matters over the laity, or ordinary folk. When these ordinary people attended church services they weren't expected to try to understand the Bible for themselves. They were told that was too difficult. The Bible wasn't even available to them in a language they could understand, and so, of course, they were totally dependent upon the professional churchmen to interpret its meaning for them.

This was a time of spiritual darkness. But as in the very beginning, God was at work to bring light out of

darkness. He raised up those who – at that time - were determined at all costs to bring God's Word, the Bible, to the common people in a way they could understand it in their own language.

This was the Reformation and, as we see, it began with the Bible once again becoming accessible to all. It allowed any previously accepted church tradition to be directly tested against the Bible's plain teaching. The 'watchword' or key phrase then was 'sola scriptura' in the old Latin language or in other words 'nothing but the Bible'. If any religious practice was not found to be supported by the Bible it was thrown out. Our spiritual welfare or even our spiritual destiny cannot be made to be dependent on what any particular man or church institution teaches – but is solely dependent on what the Bible teaches.

As Martin Luther famously declared when he stood before kings, cardinals and counsels: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God; here I stand, I can do no other." For him what the Word of God said was all that mattered – he'd be bound by it, despite what any other earthly authority might say.

That was Luther's heroic faith, and it sets the true standard. If we place any church tradition above the Bible's plain teaching then we are denying the great motto of the Reformation which was *sola scriptura* or scripture alone. An example of people who lived by that rule is found in Acts 17:11 where we meet people *who received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.*

When Luther said his conscience was bound to the Word of God, he was only saying exactly what the prophet Isaiah had said earlier as recorded in the Bible itself: 'To the law and to the testimony!' Both the words 'law' and 'testimony' there refer to the Word of God – meaning, the part of the Bible that was available to God's people at that earlier stage of history.

The full quote from Isaiah goes like this:

*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? 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)*

Most people want to know the future. Others want some assurance regarding someone who's passed on. Recently, a woman I was chatting with when handing out Christian literature – a woman who would

have described herself as a Christian – seemed oblivious to the error of spiritualism. Long ago, even God's people in Judah were pulled into the pagan practice of consulting mediums and spiritists, who specialized in trying to contact the dead (cf. Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Isaiah pointed out the absurdity of going to the dead to find out the future instead of inquiring of the living God. The place to look was in *the law and ... the testimony* (cf. Isaiah 8:16), which contained everything the nation needed to know about her future. A person's failure to pay appropriate attention to God's Word means he or she has no spiritual light (cf. John 3:19-20). Perhaps you're very clear about the error of consulting mediums. But there are more subtle ways of undermining the absolute authority of God's Word, the Bible. For example, there are those who claim their prophetic utterances carry the same weight as the Bible. But only the Bible is God's authoritative revelation to us. No less than three thousand eight hundred and eight times, the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, contains the expression 'the LORD says' before going on to give some particular message. In the original recording, this expression introduces the exact words of God himself. There's nothing comparable to that today. The Christian Faith, that unique authoritative revelation from God, was delivered by God 'once and for

all', Jude tells us (v.3).

Please note that the expression 'the LORD says' is characteristic of the whole of scripture inasmuch as God's superintendence reached down to the actual choice of the very words themselves – every word in the original writings was inspired or literally God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).

This really points up the double nature of the Bible: both its human and divine sides. The human authors of the sixty-six books - those recognized as making up the complete Bible - were drawn from various different walks of life. But behind all they wrote was the divine Author, not simply putting thoughts into their minds, but actually clothing those thoughts in words. The prophet might have only been partially enlightened as to the meaning of God's message, but the words he was caused to say or write were fully inspired, and didn't in any degree depend on the writer's level of understanding.

Sometimes we hear the objection that the Bible writers seem to have been glorified typing-machines. But it couldn't have been that way at all. Why not? Because they each had their own style of writing. And so we come to associate the apostle John, for example, with the theme of love; while also noticing that light, life and truth are words he often uses.

The explanation for these very real differences of style seems to be that

God accommodated his message to the temperament and personality of the different human instrument he chose to use. Take Luke for example. He tells us at the beginning of his gospel that he'd done a lot of careful research, and interviewing, before he put his own gospel version of events together. It was painstaking work – the work of a true historian – yet, at the same time, it was research that was superintended by God himself.

We've already said that the Bible *is* God's Word; that it doesn't only contain it. It's worth revisiting that point to also underline the fact that the Bible is inspired on all the topics it expresses itself upon. We'd be quite entitled to question its spiritual message if the Bible could be proved anywhere to be historically untrustworthy.

I'm sure we've all heard people say that there are errors in the Bible. Usually those people tend not to be very well informed. Those of us who love our Bibles as God's Word know that the English translations we have are just that – translations from the original languages. What's more, they are translations of ancient manuscripts which are themselves copies, for the original writings of the Bible are no longer in existence. What that means is that there has certainly been scope for human errors to have crept in. However, on this very practical side of things, there's much, much more evidence

for the Bible we have today being genuinely authentic to the original – more than exists to authenticate any other piece of ancient literature. Even when different manuscripts are used as a basis for translating the Bible there's still overwhelming agreement. Points of difference occur, but they don't cast doubt on any of the Bible's teaching. Our Bible is something we can have confidence in as being God's Word to us.

So we have in our possession this collection of sixty-six authoritative books which we call the Bible. But have you ever wondered if there shouldn't maybe be only sixty-five or even sixty-seven books? If so, it's a very reasonable question! But it's good for us to realize that the Lord Jesus put his seal on the Old

Testament. It was already compiled at the time when he was here. Those thirty-nine books – as we count them – were the Scriptures he used here on earth, and he spoke of them as a complete entity, referring to all the things relating to himself in the writings of Moses and all the prophets (Luke 24:27). In the case of the New Testament, the writers were apostles or their close associates, and they reference and endorse each other's writings (as in 2 Peter 3:16) so that we have important cross-checks.

The Bible, alone, is the only authority for the Christian faith – let's remember that's the significance of *sola scriptura* !

## 2. Sola Fide

### — by faith alone!

As we begin this chapter, I'd like to take you back to a time before the Reformation of the 16th century.

Have you heard the one about the weeping professor? No, it's not a joke; it's the true story about the spiritual crisis that deeply troubled one particular professor of literature as he struggled to live down his turbulent past, way back in the 4th century. It was the preaching of a man called Ambrose that had brought him to conviction of sin in his past life. He knew that as a young man he'd lived quite a shameful life – even as his mother had faithfully prayed for him. Now, he was greatly disturbed about it. Unable to find rest, he went out into the sunshine of his back garden in Milan, in Italy. There he was, sitting under a tree and breaking his heart, when all of a sudden he heard some young children playing outside, chanting their little song: "... pick up and read ...". Wondering if this could possibly be the answer for him, he picked up and read from Romans 13 in his Bible which happened to be lying handy. There he read the words: 'not in riots and drunken parties ...' – yes, that had been his past all right – the Bible text continued: *not in riots and drunken parties ... put on the Lord*

*Jesus Christ*. He did, and that was how the famous Augustine got saved in the year 386 AD.

Nearly 1200 years later, this time in Germany, a monk of the order of Augustine was undergoing his very own spiritual crisis. He was wrestling with the meaning of a different Bible text. It was:

*For in it (that is, the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)*

It was about this verse that he said: 'Night and day I thought over it until ... I understood that the righteousness of God is of such a nature that He justifies us by grace and mercy through faith. Upon that I felt I was reborn and had entered Paradise through an open door.'

The name of the man who entered through the door, as he put it, the open door of Romans 1:17 was Martin Luther, of course, and within 2 years, in the year 1517, he would in turn open the door on the Reformation. Luther's momentous discovery was that God justifies a person through faith alone. This was, of course, simply a re-discovery of a wonderful Bible teaching which had

been lost through the Dark Ages. Human understanding had been darkened and misled into thinking that a person had to do all kinds of things in order to even hope he or she could get right with God. We've just used the expression 'to get right with God' as an explanation of what it means to be justified. Some like to remember the meaning of 'justify' by using a little word-play: just-as-if-I'd never sinned. Certainly, that's the sense of it: it's our being brought into a right relationship with God as a result of our sins having all been forgiven, and removed from God's sight.

We've already noted that Luther's discovery of 'justification by faith' was, in fact, a rediscovery. It is something that's plain to see from the Bible. For Luther's message was the same as had been the teaching of Christ's apostles, like Paul, who wrote ... *we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.* (Romans 3:28)

No change there then. That's exactly the same truth which Luther re-discovered in the 16th century. It was like finding buried treasure – lost for centuries – except this is something much more than gold. It's priceless to know we're in a right relationship with God, and that this has been brought about not by our own efforts or merit, but simply through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, when he died on the cross as *the Just for*

*the unjust, so that He might bring us to God* (1 Peter 3:18).

This long-lost teaching, which God used Luther to bring again to light, was described then in the old Latin language as *sola fide* or 'by faith alone'. For centuries before this, religious professionals had corrupted the plain meaning of the Bible, ensuring the common people remained in darkness. But then, in the Reformation period, with a drive by some to get directly back to the Bible for guidance, these precious truths began to be rediscovered.

Even today, such is the lasting impact of traditional religious teachings which date from after the time of Christ's apostles, and from before the time of Martin Luther, that even many sincere church-going folks struggle to realize that it's 'faith alone' that brings us into a right relationship with God. This is despite the fact that there's generally no shortage of having the Bible available to us today in our own language.

Could it be that ignorance of the Bible, God's Word, is still holding many back? Or is it a failure to take God's Word seriously? After all, the apostle Paul could hardly have said it more plainly when he wrote: *we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*

But there's another factor, too. It's human pride. God is asking us to swallow our pride, realize our own helplessness, and to understand that he – through the cross – has done

everything that he himself required to be done for our salvation from the penalty of sin. A substitute, Jesus Christ his Son, has paid the price of our rebellion instead of us. All God asks of us, according to the Bible, is that we turn to him, throwing ourselves on his mercy, and gratefully receive by faith what God himself has done to bring us into a right relationship with himself. We simply need to endorse what Christ has done for us, by faith on our part.

Let me try to illustrate why you might still find that hard to do. Vance Packard in his book *The Hidden Persuaders* – one I remember being asked to read at school – tells of homemakers' problems with cake mixes in the early days when such mixes first appeared. Cake-mix packages would warn housewives not to add milk, but 'just add water'. Some housewives would add milk anyway, as their special touch, and then be disappointed when the cakes or muffins didn't turn out well. Some cake mixes would also prohibit adding eggs, since eggs and milk had already been added in dry form by the manufacturer. Obviously, some market research was needed to find out what was happening, why the product was not meeting with success. Women interviewed said: "What sort of cake is it if you just need to add tap water!" So the marketing needed to be changed. The mixes needed to tell the homemaker that she and the mix together could produce the cake. A

white cake mix box now proclaimed, "You add fresh eggs." The message was: there is a contribution you can make!

It seems to be in our nature now to insist on making our own contribution – especially in spiritual matters. But God in his Word has not changed his recipe for human salvation. The cake-mix recipe might have changed away from 'water alone'; but the unchanging Word of God still says 'faith alone'. We are forgiven or justified through faith alone.

But let me make this final point. We've been stressing *sola fide* or 'by faith alone' – it is only through our faith in Christ that the Bible tells us we are justified in God's sight and so ready for heaven. Only faith, but it must be real faith – not an empty profession.

In the 19th century there was a tightrope stunt artist known professionally as the 'The Great Blondin'. In 1859, he was the first person to walk across on a 335 metre rope suspended high over the water of the Niagara Falls in Canada which plunged down far below him. On one occasion, he asked the crowd, "How many of you believe that I, The Great Blondin, can not only walk back across that tightrope, but this time do it while I push a wheelbarrow?"

Again they cried, "We believe! We believe!"

Then he asked, "How many of you really believe it?"

"Oh, we really believe it!" they shouted back.

One man, a little more enthusiastic than the others, caught The Great Blondin's eye. Pointing to the man, he said, "If you really believe, then get in the wheelbarrow." The man quickly disappeared. The difference

between what we say we believe and what we really believe will always show up in our actions.

So remember, it's not faith mixed with any of our own good works or prayers or church-going or religious actions or presumed merit – just *sola fide* or by faith alone! But it must be real faith all the same.

# 3. Solus Christus

## — by Christ alone!

We come now to the third truth that was rediscovered at the time of the Reformation. So far, we've thought about *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*— in other words — 'only by the Bible' and 'by faith alone'. It was at this time that people again began to see that the Bible — and not any church tradition — is the only authority for the Christian faith. And also that faith alone, and not any works of our own, is what brings us into a right relationship with God.

Now, to *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* we must add *solus christus*— or by Christ alone. In the light of what we've just been saying, I should allow scripture alone to prove the point, so here's what we find in Acts 4:12:

*"... there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

No other name than the name of Jesus Christ, as the context would plainly show. Salvation from the penalty our sins demand is not found in churches or creeds, but in Christ alone. Hymn-writers ever since have warmed to this great Bible theme, with words like:

... none but Christ can satisfy,

None other Name for me!  
There's love, and life, and lasting  
joy,  
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.

(Author unknown)

Perhaps, at this point, I can complete the chain of events which we began to trace in the previous chapter. It started with Augustine and his conversion through reading scripture in 386 AD. Then 1200 years later, Martin Luther, while he was serving as a monk of the order of Augustine, rediscovered the great Bible teaching of 'justification by faith'.

But there's a further link in this historic chain of testimony. Because on the evening of the 24th May, in the year 1738, a man by the name of John Wesley went 'very unwillingly', he admitted, to a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate Street, London. At this meeting, he was to hear someone reading a foreword to the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. But guess whose foreword it was? It was Martin Luther's! For the rest, we should now let John Wesley take up the story in his own words. He says: "At about quart(er) to 9 while hearing about the change God works in our heart through faith in Christ, I found my (own) heart strangely warmed. I felt I trusted on Christ

alone for salvation."

That's how John Wesley received the assurance that his sins were taken away, and so began the great 18th century Revival! It's said that Wesley rode 250,000 miles on horseback and preached 40,000 sermons in the course of a life that was dedicated to spreading the good news of 'Christ alone'. Remember, how he'd testified: 'I felt I trusted on Christ alone for salvation'. Notice the emphasis on 'Christ alone' – that's exactly precious truth number 3, rediscovered from the time of the Reformation.

To *sola scriptura* and to *sola fide* we now have to add *solus Christus* – by scripture alone; by faith alone and now also by Christ alone.

Our main point is that I need to be found trusting in Christ alone for my eternal salvation – not in Christ and my good character, or Christ and my good works, or Christ and my religious observances, or Christ and some other religious leader.

In the matter of securing our eternal future, we need to be found leaning our whole weight upon Christ and upon no-one and nothing else. That reminds me of the story of John Paton.

John Paton was a missionary to cannibals in the New Hebrides. When translating one of the gospels into a local language, he had a problem finding a word in their language that meant the same as what the New Testament means when it talks about

our trusting in Christ. The islanders trusted nobody and so there wasn't even a word for 'trust' in their language. His native assistant entered the room and Paton had an idea. "What am I doing?" Paton asked. The man replied that he was sitting at his desk. Paton then raised both feet off the floor and sat back on his chair. "What am I doing now?" he asked. In reply, the native used a verb which means 'to lean your whole weight upon'. This is the expression that Paton used through the gospel to translate what it means 'to believe in' Jesus.

And there are very good reasons to believe in Jesus Christ. Among all those who compete for the allegiance of the hearts of men and women, Jesus Christ is the only religious leader who ever claimed to be God, who lived a sinless life, who fulfilled prophecy written hundreds of years before he was born, and then died on the cross for human sins before rising from the dead. Jesus Christ is incomparable. He is totally unique. He is God's 'one-of-a-kind' Son.

The modern hymn-writer (Stuart Townend) has said it like this:

In Christ alone! who took on flesh  
Fulness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones he came to  
save:

Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied -  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain:  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave he rose again!  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine -  
Bought with the precious blood of  
Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath.  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of  
man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll  
stand.

That hymn is simple called 'In Christ  
alone' and gives us many solid,  
Biblical reasons why Christ, and  
Christ alone, is deserving of our trust  
– for now and for eternity.

It's not about how much faith you  
have; what matters is what you place  
that faith in. Perhaps we can  
illustrate that point, too. I have a  
friend whose mother does parachute  
jumps for charity, and so I was  
interested to hear the story of  
someone who had a choice of  
parachutes. One had been packed by  
a smiling group of young amateur  
volunteers. The next parachute came  
with a note which read: 'used only  
once before, previous owner  
deceased'. The final parachute was  
brand new, thoroughly checked, and  
had been packed by an expert. Now,  
which would you put your trust in – if  
you had to? I know which I'd choose!  
The object of our trust is critical. It's  
only worth putting our trust in  
something or someone who's  
trustworthy. That's why I invite you  
to place your trust in Christ alone.

# 4. Sola Gratia

## - by grace alone!

Are you good at remembering things? Do you use short-cuts to help you? I'd like to give you a few – to help you remember the vital truths we've been sharing in this booklet. We began, as we said, with the BIBLE. Think of the letters B,I,B,L,E – and remember the saying 'Because It Brings Life Eternal'. The first letters of each word in order spells Bible. Next, we talked about FAITH. Now I want you to think of the letters F,A,I,T,H – 'Forsaking All I Trust Him'. That's a helpful reminder of what faith really means. True faith doesn't keep its options open. What we've been emphasizing is a faith that forsakes everything else to rely solely on Christ for forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.

For Christ, I'm going to suggest something slightly different. Most will be familiar with the Christian 'fish' symbol. It's been a Christian symbol from the earliest days of Christianity, from the time when the Greek language was the major world language. The Greek word for 'fish' is ICHTHUS, where each of the five Greek letters in the original word are drawn in turn from the initial letters of Jesus, Christ, God's Son and Saviour – reminding us that Jesus is the Christ, the Bible's promised

Messiah and he's God's Son and Saviour to all who turn from their sins to God and believe in him.

Now we're going to look at God's grace. We'll be thinking about 'grace alone'. How should we remember grace in a way that's like the other helps we've been using? Well, think of the letters G,R,A,C,E – and let them remind you of 'God's Righteousness At Christ's Expense'. And that's what we're going to look at now.

I'm reminded of a note I received from a young man in another country. He was describing a man he'd been witnessing to. He referred to him as an SSBG. Think about what we've been sharing already where letters stand for the entire word which begins with that letter. I wonder then what an SSBG means? There's a clue in this great Bible verse: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.* (Ephesians 2:8)

Yes, he was telling me about a Sinner Saved By Grace (SSBG)! I can tell you straight away that I'm one of those too – as I hope you are also. Because, you know, we're all sinners as Romans 3:23 says, so there are

only two kinds of people in the world: saved sinners and sinners who don't have a saviour.

But before I forget, let me tell you about the man my young friend was describing to me in this way. To avenge the death of his son by communist rebels in 1987, this man – who lived in the Philippines – committed multiple rape and murder which resulted in him receiving a 20-year prison sentence. But in prison he received Christ, and began to study his Bible. In due course, he was released from prison, having served his sentence. My young friend now takes up the report, "When we arrived at his home, testifying of God's [grace and of his] house [where he lives on earth today], he received our testimony ... and was not ashamed to testify to his families and neighbours about us.

"This SSBG (Sinner Saved By Grace!) is 75 years old, and when given a translation of [a booklet called] 'Ye that are Christ's', he said that he learned much truth from it, and has offered his own land free so that a temporary meeting-place can be built to accommodate the 25 interested persons."

Sarenas truly is a sinner saved by grace. Perhaps you regard him as having done such terrible crimes that he doesn't deserve to know personal forgiveness from God? Maybe right now you're comparing your own life, it could easily be that it's much more respectable.

But salvation is not something which any one of us deserves. Let's read our Bible text again: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

It goes on to say that salvation is not of works so that no one can boast. The word 'grace' means God's undeserved favour which he shows to us in granting any one of us salvation, in other words the forgiveness of our sins.

During the Spanish-American War, Theodore Roosevelt came to Clara Barton of the Red Cross to buy some supplies for his sick and wounded men. His request was refused. Roosevelt was troubled and asked, "How can I get these things? I must have proper food for my sick men." "Just ask for them, Colonel", said Barton.

"Oh", said Roosevelt, "then I do ask for them." He got them at once through grace, not through purchase. (Illustration for Biblical Preaching by Michael P. Green p. 176)

A famous Greek name which we may recognize is that of Aristotle. He had a definition of grace back in those days which went like this:

it was a favour freely done for a friend; something with no expectation of any return; something commendable since it was beyond the call of duty.

But the way, the word used in the

New Testament takes its meaning a giant step further forward! You see, 'grace' describes God's unmerited favour shown towards us – not when we were His friends, but – *While we were enemies* (Romans 5:10)!

This is God's free grace. But I don't want you to think for a moment that it cheapens salvation. Let me tell you that God's grace is free, but it's not cheap.

The preacher G. Campbell Morgan was once approached by a soldier who said he would give anything to believe that God would forgive sins, "But I cannot believe He will forgive me if I just turn to Him. It is too cheap."

Dr. Morgan said to him: "You were working in the mine today. How did you get out of the pit?"

He answered, "The way I usually do; I got into the cage and was pulled to the top."

"How much did you pay to come out of the pit?"

"I didn't pay anything."

"Weren't you afraid to trust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?"

The man replied, "Oh, no! It was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink that shaft."

The man saw the light, that it was the infinite price paid by the Son of God for our salvation, which comes to us by faith and not by anything

that we can do (James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 257-258).

God's grace is certainly not cheap. Such a thing as 'cheap grace', if it exists in the minds of people, is grace without the cross. It is believing without repentance. Among the earliest recorded words of Jesus Christ in his own preaching was 'repent' (Matthew 4:17). Salvation costs us nothing, it is God's free gift – the Bible says – *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:23)

But we must be willing, as influenced by the work of God's Spirit, to allow God to change us. We cannot change ourselves, we come as we are to Christ in simple faith. Nothing in our hands – no works of our own to display.

An artist once saw a beggar at the side of the road. It suggested a painting in his mind which he would entitle 'man at the end'. He hired the beggar to sit for him, set him a date to come to his studio, and paid him half the agreed money in advance. On the agreed date when the beggar arrived, the artist didn't recognize him – he'd used the money to smarten himself up! "Oh, no!" said the artist, "I wanted you to come as you were!" And that's how we're to come to God – just as we are!

# 5. Soli Deo Gloria

## – Glory to God alone

As soon as the organist finished playing, an appreciative listener praised the wonderful skill that had been displayed. The organist, however, replied saying: "There is nothing very wonderful about it; you have only to hit the right notes at the right moment and the instrument does the rest."

Who was the modest organist? None other than Johann Sebastian Bach, the master musician, who also said: "Music's only purpose should be the glory of God and the recreation of the human spirit."

Bach's own life was consistent with his beliefs. Although his was a musical genius only found perhaps once in a century, he chose to live an obscure life. Only once in his 65 years did he actually take a job where his brilliance brought him to the world's notice. For a while he worked as Kapellmeister of the court of Prince Leopold. But such surroundings were a distraction to him. He soon left again to accept a lowly position.

The attitude and conduct of Johann Sebastian Bach is a good example for this final topic in our study of five sacred solos. The title refers to five great truths or teachings

rediscovered at the time known as the Reformation period in Europe.

So our final motto from that Reformation time is *solī deo gloria* – or 'Glory to God alone'.

What has come to be known as the Westminster Shorter Catechism was written in the 1640s by English and Scottish churchmen. Its purpose was to educate lay persons in matters of doctrine. It has a simple question and answer format to make things easier to remember. The catechism is made up of 107 questions and answers. The most famous of the questions is the first. It asks:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

To which the answer is given:

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Man's chief end, was perfectly demonstrated in the greatest ever human life – that of Jesus Christ. In every possible way, God was glorified through the perfect life of Christ. It's John's Gospel which emphasizes this, as he writes to declare that Jesus Christ is fully God as well as fully human.

So, when telling us about the first ever miracle Jesus did, John has this to say:

*This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory. (John 2:11)*

In other words, God's glory was displayed in Jesus' life. I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul's words later in the Bible, when he wrote *whatever you do* – and it was in connection with eating and drinking – *do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31). That was certainly true of Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee.

Then one day, John says, ...

*As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:1-3)*

God's works, as performed by Jesus Christ here, in the healing of the blind man, were for God's own glory. The miracles performed by the Lord Jesus were not works which he himself chose to do for the sake of impressing the crowds. Far from it, Jesus describes them as *the works which the Father has given me to accomplish* (John 5:36). By doing them, the Son was glorifying the Father. And so, it was the very same when Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. As Jesus reminded one of the sisters Lazarus had:

*"Did I not say to you that if you*

*believe, you will see the glory of God?" (John 11:40)*

Notice again, it's all about the glory of God. That was always the focus of our Lord's life – he did not live so as to make a reputation for himself, but that God's name should always be glorified. That was never more true than in relation to his death – which was the reason why he'd come – and about which he had this to say:

*"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (John 12:27-28)*

God's name was glorified in the life and death of his holy servant Jesus, who could say, rightly, in summing up his own life in prayer to God, his Father:

*"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." (John 17:4)*

This was the chief end of the perfect man: he had glorified God throughout his entire life. In this Christ has set an example for us. For it's also God's desire that over all our lives – now as well as in eternity – the banner should be 'for the glory of God'. I know of no better section in the Bible to use to support that thought than the paragraph with which Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus begins:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 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.*

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.*

*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 1:3-14)*

You'll have noticed that expression which occurred there no less than three times – and with which it ended – 'to the praise of God's glory'. God's eternal purpose in human creation is that we should be eternally to the praise of his glory – trophies of divine grace.

So indeed, man's chief end is to glorify God. Knowing this to be true, we should make it our aim that everything we do is for the glory of God. As Paul said: *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* (1 Corinthians 10:31)

He referenced eating and drinking simply because that was what he was dealing with at that moment. But it's generally true that the glory of God is intended to be the ruling motive in the Christian's life, not just our having our own way about our own whims and preferences.

In addition, there are specific areas we can concentrate on that really bring glory to God. The words of the Lord Jesus, our great example, as recorded in John's Gospel give us a couple. Jesus says:

*"Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:13)*

And:

*"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish,*

*and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (John 15:7,8)*

In other words, a life of prayer that aims at fruitful service for God, is sure to bring glory to God.



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31m band SW (9870 kHz.); 49m band SW (6105 kHz.)

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