

The Five Solas of the Reformation: Soli Deo Gloria

OPENING TEXT: 1PETER 4:10-11 AND PSALM 145

INTRODUCTION

1. At the bottom of every composition by Johann Sebastian Bach were three initials: SDG (*Soli Deo Gloria*).
2. Bach intended it to be a reminder that all things, including his music, are to be done to the glory of God.

I. THE DEFINITION OF SOLI DEO GLORIA

A. A Simple Definition

1. *Soli Deo Gloria* is a Latin phrase coined during the sixteenth century Reformation Movement.
2. The glory of the true and living God is the proper purpose, aim, and end of all things.

B. Historical Context and Exposition

1. **The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 2 Of God and Of the Holy Trinity**
2. **The Westminster Confession... – Chapter 8 Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day**

C. A Modern Definition and Affirmation

The Cambridge Declaration (1996)

D. Summarizing the Central Presuppositions and Affirmations

1. The universe and everything in it was created for the glory of the eternal God.
2. The purpose of human existence and the end for which we should strive is the glory of God.
3. God is glorified when we order our lives, values, and worship according to His revealed will.

II. THE AFFIRMATIONS OF SOLI DEO GLORIA

A. *Soli Deo Gloria* Affirms the Universe and Everything in It Was Created for the Glory of God

1. God is glorified in His gratuitous works of creation, providence, and redemption. **Ps. 145:10**
 - These works are *gratuitous* because they are unnecessary; God had no need for them.
 - He created from love, not need. He preserves from love, not obligation.
 - God redeems the unworthy and ungodly because He is good, not because we are.
2. God is glorified in the rule and judgment of His creatures.
 - The Lord is glorified by dispensing grace to those unworthy of His benevolence. **Eph. 1:3-6**
 - The glory of God is displayed in His wisdom and power applied in redemption. **Eph. 3:8-12**
 - John Piper helps us understand what is meant here by God's glory:
"The glory of God is the holiness of God put on display. That is, it is the infinite worth of God made manifest.... God's glory is the outward radiance of the intrinsic beauty and greatness of His manifold perfections." (<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/soli-deo-gloria/>)
 - The outworking of God's creation, sovereignty, and justice all magnify Him. **1Chr. 29:10-14**
--These exercises of power and judgment display His greatness in Heaven and on Earth.
--Creation and covenants allow us to witness aspects of the divine nature otherwise unseen.
 - God is even glorified in the judgment of the wicked; their sin does not rob Him of glory.
--The Lord used Pharaoh and Egypt's sin and rebellion for His own glory. **Exod. 14:4, 15-18**
--The Lord was glorified in destroying an entire generation in the wilderness. **Num. 14:20-23**
--The Lord is glorified whenever He comes to judge a rebellious nation. **Mark 13:26**
--The Lord will be glorified when every knee bows and confesses Christ. **Php. 2:9-11**
--The Lord will be glorified when He comes again to judge the world. **2Th. 1:6-10; Mt. 25:31**
 - We must recognize God is glorious in both salvation *and* condemnation. **Rom. 9:17-24**

B. *Soli Deo Gloria* Affirms Human Exist for and Should Strive Toward the Glory of God

1. If all things were created for God's glory, then glorifying Him is the purpose of our existence.
 - "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." (WSC Q1A)
--John Piper re-wrote this as: "Man's chief end is to glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever."
--His thesis is that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied with Him.
--In other words, grudging conformity to rules is not the goal, but loving, reverent union.

- The Scriptures teach us plainly we were made for such reverence, love, and submission.
 - Isa. 43:7:** “...everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made.”
 - Ecc. 12:13-14:** “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
 - Col. 1:16:** “...all things were created through him and for him.”
 - Rom. 9:20-21:** “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”
 - John 15:8:** “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”
 - 1Cor. 6:19b-20:** “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

2. God is glorified in the reverence, love, obedience, and submission of His creatures.
3. Our lives do not belong to us. We do not exist to have happiness, good health, or success.
 - People search continually for meaning. We try to create it for ourselves in countless ways.
 - But no effort, no matter how noble or praiseworthy, can give life meaning apart from God.
 - Your life will be full of Christ, or it will be devoid of meaning. There are no other options.

C. *Soli Deo Gloria Affirms God is Glorified When We Order Our Lives, Values, and Worship by His Will*

1. Our original text makes this point powerfully and plainly. **1Pet. 4:10-11**
 - Doing God’s will in God’s way while acknowledging God’s gifts gives God glory.
 - But doing our will in our way, relying on our strength, does not glorify God but us.
2. How should we live, think, worship? The Scriptures are provided to answer these questions.
 - Do not go beyond or stop short of what He has said. **Deut. 4:2; Pr. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19**
 - We must be content with the revealed word of God. **Deut. 29:29; 1Cor. 4:6; 2Jn. 9-11**
 - It is not your life, your truth, your right, or your church. It all is God’s and for His glory.
3. Our entire lives should seek conformity to God’s will, not the way of this world. **Rom. 12:1-2**
 - No aspect of life is too small to consider in this light; careless words count. **Matt. 12:36-37**
 - Even our thoughts must be brought into captivity to Christ – no easy task! **2Cor. 10:5**
 - Everything in life is worship or sin; there is no other category for believers. **Rom. 12:2; 14:23**

III. THE APPLICATION OF SOLI DEO GLORIA

A. *How Soli Deo Gloria Will Affect Our Church’s Life and Ministry*

1. We must evaluate every decision regarding worship and ministry in light of the *sola* principles.
 - Does it glorify God? How do I know? Is it grounded in Scripture? Is it gospel-focused?
 - Anything and everything not consistent with Scripture and God’s glory should be discarded.
2. This means becoming fairly radical in our willingness to judge what we have done before.
 - What is God’s glory worth to us? Do we truly want to honor Him? Are we playing church?
 - If you want a culturally palatable and convenient religion, God’s glory cannot be a priority.

B. *How Soli Deo Gloria Will Affect Our Daily Lives*

1. The same kind of rigorous, repentant examination of our personal life and thought is *apropos*.
 - This is not intended to provoke morbid introspection, but sober interaction with God’s will.
 - If we take God’s glory seriously, we will seek to do what we can to pursue and display it.
2. “Can I glorify God doing this?” “Is this consistent with the purpose and aim of my creation?”
3. Pursuing holiness and the glory of God is the life we were made for, literally, the best life now.

CONCLUSION

1. Could we write *SDG* at the bottom of everything we create and do? I cannot, and I desperately need Jesus.
2. You need Him too, no matter who you are (**Jer. 13:16**). May God use us for and lead us to His eternal glory.

EXTENDED QUOTATIONS

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566): Chapter IV – Of Idols or Images of God, Christ and the Saints

IMAGES OF GOD. Since God as Spirit is in essence invisible and immense, he cannot really be expressed by any art or image. For this reason we have no fear pronouncing with Scripture that images of God are mere lies. Therefore we reject not only the idols of the Gentiles, but also the images of Christians.

IMAGES OF CHRIST. Although Christ assumed human nature, yet he did not on that account assume it in order to provide a model for carvers and painters. He denied that he had come "to abolish the law and the prophets" (Matt. 5:17). But images are forbidden by the law and the prophets" (Deut. 4:15; Isa. 44:9). He denied that his bodily presence would be profitable for the Church, and promised that he would be near us by his Spirit forever (John 16:7). Who, therefore, would believe that a shadow or likeness of his body would contribute any benefit to the pious? (II Cor. 5:5). Since he abides in us by his Spirit, we are therefore the temple of God (I Cor. 3:16). But "what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" (II Cor. 6:16).

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 2: Of God, and Of the Holy Trinity

I. There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

II. God has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He has made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and has most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleases. In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 21: Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day

I. The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

II. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and, since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.

The Cambridge Declaration (1996)

Soli Deo Gloria: The Erosion Of God-Centered Worship

Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing his work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

Thesis Five: Soli Deo Gloria

We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory and that we must glorify him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for his glory alone. We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we neglect either Law or Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfillment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel.