

Introduction
to the
5 Solas

What are the 5 Solas?

The 5 Solas are stated in Latin. The word 'Sola' means 'Alone'. The 5 solas are:

- Sola Scriptura, meaning Scripture Alone
- Sola Fide, meaning Faith Alone
- Sola Gratia, meaning Grace Alone
- Solus Christus, meaning Christ Alone,
- Soli Deo Gloria, meaning To God be the Glory Alone

You may be thinking: Why the different versions of 'Sola', 'Solus', 'Soli'? In Latin grammar, 'Sola' is feminine, 'Solus' is masculine and thus used for Christ (Solus Christus). 'Soli' is used for an indirect object. (What is an 'indirect object'? Consider the sentence: "The boy kicks the ball to the girl". "The boy" is the subject, "the ball" is the direct object, whereas "the girl" is the indirect object. An indirect object answers the question: 'to whom', 'for whom' or 'for what'. Hence Soli Deo Gloria is "TO God be the glory alone".)

How to remember?

There is a logical way of recalling the 5 Solas without missing out any of them. You can think of it this way:

- The starting point is the basis of truth: **the Scripture**
- The ending point is **the glory of God**

The start and the end correspond to the first two questions of the shorter catechism: [the ending point:] What is the chief end of man? [the starting point:] What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

- In between the start and the end is the crucial question of **salvation**. How am I saved? The nub of the answer is expressed in **6 words**:

By grace, through faith, in Christ.

A slightly expanded version for clarity is:

**By [God's] grace,
through [the instrumentality of] faith,
in [the Person and Work of] Christ.**

You remember the 5 Solas like you would remember a story with a **start**, **middle** and **end**. It is a love story, where God chose to set his love upon an innumerable group of un-loveable people, and did all that is necessary to redeem them to himself in Christ, so that forever He is their God, and they are his people. The world is seeking for the ever illusive fairy-tale ending, but it is only God's elect who can truly and really live happily ever after. The happiness is in having God as their portion.

Why are the 5 Solas important?

The 5 Solas form the pillars of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. They stand in contradistinction to the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. These errors had corrupted the gospel of Christ so that it has become another gospel. Scripture has very strong words for those who corrupt the gospel:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. [Gal 1:6-9]

God raised up men to deliver his people from the bondage of these errors. You are blessed to be brought up in the rich spiritual heritage of the Protestant Reformation. You must know the errors and their dangers, you must know the truth, you must know what you are protesting and against whom you are protesting.

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free [John 8:32]

To properly understand the 5 Solas, you need to understand the issues/questions to which the Solas answer in opposition to teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, for each of the 'Sola':

- You need to be able to articulate what is the key issue/question at hand;

- You need to be able to articulate the point of contention between Rome and the Reformation. This means articulating what is Rome's position and what is our position; and lastly,
- You need to be able to defend our position, even if it is a simple defence. Scripture says that we must *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear* (1 Pet 3:15). If someone asks you why Sola Fide, what would you say? Because my pastor says so? Because my dad and mum says so? And if you say because it is taught in the Scriptures, then are you able to point out where in the Scriptures? Now 'defending' may seem like a difficult thing, but it isn't because built into the catechism is a defence of our position... and you have already gone through the entire catechism once during your grade 1-3 class! You just need to recognise which are the relevant catechism questions and answers and then strengthen that with scriptural proofs.

In addition to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, you will also be given some snippets of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Shorter Catechism is 'Short'. It has been shortened by leaving out information for the sake of teaching children and young believers. Yes, you are a child, for the present, but you are growing older, and you won't be a child for much longer. You need to know that there is a fuller body of instruction in the Confession of Faith, and you need to have an appreciation of its robustness, clarity and beauty.

Miscellaneous

- In your handouts, 'Rome' is short for the 'Roman Catholic Church'. In quotations from the reformers, sometimes the old and archaic word 'papist' is used to refer to the 'Roman Catholic Church'. Just as Rome would call us 'Protestants', we would call them 'Papists'.
- In order to understand the position of Rome, some information is presented of their beliefs and practices. This is done so that you can contrast the Scriptural teaching with Rome's corruptions.
- The position of Rome is always something that is added to corrupt Scriptural teaching: Scripture + Tradition; Faith + Works; Grace + Merit; Christ + Priests + Sacramentalism; God's glory + Man's glory.