



A Lutheran Primer¹

Psalm 29 Ephesians 2:1-10 John 14:1-6

October 20, 2024

Pastor Dave Bolte

Most people have no idea what it means to be a Lutheran. Most people in the world **reject Christ** and are not even interested in anything Christian, *let alone Lutheran*. Even inside the Christian Church, most people are not concerned about doctrine and theology, let alone the history of the church... so “Lutheran” is not even on their radar. **Thankfully**, a part of our culture as conservative Lutherans is to be very concerned about doctrine and theology and the history of the Church. As we get ready to celebrate the **Lutheran Reformation** next week, let's review exactly what it means to be a **conservative Lutheran Christian**².

One way to do that is by summarizing Lutheran Doctrine and Theology with the 5 phrases that came out of the 1500's; those five phrases are called **the Five Solas**. **Sola** is a Latin word that means “alone, or only”. It is the basis of the English word “solo”. The Lutheran Reformation can be summarized with the words **ONLY Scripture, ONLY Grace, ONLY Faith, ONLY Christ, and to God ONLY be the Glory!**

SOLA SCRIPTURA

The first is **sola scriptura** – **ONLY SCRIPTURE!** At the time of the Reformation, Scripture wasn't the authority in the Church. Past writings of theologians, previous “councils” of the Church, and official decrees from the Popes --- together these are referred to as the “**tradition**” of the Church --- were the authority in the Roman Catholic Church. They were considered equal to and even greater than Scripture; and frequently the “**tradition**” contradicted the Bible.

¹ “Primer” is from a Latin word for “primary” and means a “book that serves as an introduction to a subject of study.”

² You have to speak like this to make definitions and distinctions between Lutherans and other Christian beliefs. This phrase “conservative Lutheran” is especially meant to be a technical term to distinguish us from liberal “Lutherans” who keep the name Lutheran but do not hold to the teachings of the Lutheran Church. Liberal Lutherans do not hold to the Word of God nor the Gospel of Christ but rather are intensely pursuing worldly things such as drag queen Pastors, human rights, “gender and climate” justice, and unity of all religious groups. Dr. Peter Scaer recently (8/8/24) posted how a liberal Lutheran Church (ELCA) had changed the Lord's prayer to: “Our Guardian, our mother, our Father, who art in heaven . . .”

Luther and the Reformers rejected tradition as the authority; they held that the Bible was the Word of God and the only authority in matters of Christian faith and life. Holy Scriptures are inspired and inerrant; they are the voice of Christ teaching His Church; they are the power of Holy Spirit to save and sanctify people. **The Bible is the Word of God and the only authority in matters of Christian faith and life.**

Here is a well known saying from the Reformation-era that captures the essence of *sola scriptura*:

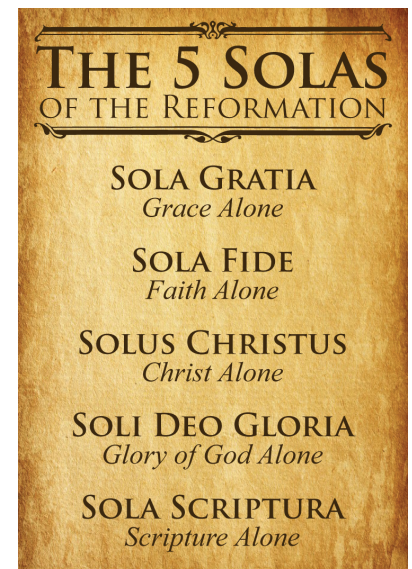
“We have another rule, namely, that the **WORD OF GOD** shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel.” SMALCALD ARTICLES

Martin Luther and the Reformers held that the Bible was the Word of God and the only authority in matters of Christian faith and life. **That remains our bold confession even today!** The phrase that describes this is *sola scriptura* – **ONLY SCRIPTURE!**

SOLA GRATIA

A second truth of the Lutheran Reformation is taught in the words *sola gratia*: **ONLY GRACE**. Grace is a New Testament word for “gift”, and it highlights that salvation comes to us as a gift from God’s Good hand. God is loving and merciful towards us in Christ; forgiveness, life, and salvation are gifts from God.

In the Reformation times, the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that men could do good works to make up for their sin and that God would then accept those good works³. They taught that Original sin did not totally and thoroughly corrupt us, but it was only an inclination towards evil. People were taught that they had to assist in their salvation. I am sure you have heard the saying, “*God helps those who help themselves.*”



Luther and the Reformers rejected this; they taught that salvation is from God alone because of His grace: God’s goodness, mercy, and kindness in His Son Jesus saves us. **GRACE ALONE:** not “grace + good works = salvation”. Grace alone brings salvation! The Bible clearly teaches *sola gratia*; here is an example:

³ Martin Luther came out of that system as a monk and professor; he knew and understood it thoroughly. Near the end of his life, reflecting back in the “Smalcald Articles,” he wrote that there was “no faith and no Christ” in the Roman Catholic way of salvation. That was a brutal observation and judgment that reflects how serious and dangerous it is. Salvation in the Roman Catholic system is purely by your own work and effort. “No faith and no Christ,” as Luther put it. (See Smalcald Articles, Part 3.III.20)

For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**—not by works, so that no one can boast. EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Martin Luther and the Reformers held that salvation is by GRACE ALONE; His goodness, mercy, and kindness saves us! **That remains our bold confession even today!** The phrase that describes this *sola gratia*: **ONLY GRACE!**

SOLA FIDE

Grace ALONE leads directly to **FAITH ALONE**: *sola fide*. Faith is the way that salvation becomes your very own. *The gospel is a promise that God is making to you: the promise is that your sins are forgiven because of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Do you believe it or not? Faith is believing the promise⁴. You believe God is telling the truth. You believe that you are included in the promise. You are confident that your sins are forgiven because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the time of the Reformation, people were told that their salvation depended on them and their good works: their prayers, their money, their worship, their pilgrimages --- and even after they died, they would have to suffer for their sins in purgatory.

Luther and the Reformers rejected all of this; the Bible teaches that we are passive in salvation; God is active. God saves us by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Savior! Faith is way that all the blessings of God are poured into your life – including forgiveness, peace and eternal life. The Bible clearly teaches *sola fide*; here is an example:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the **power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." ROMANS 1:16-17

Martin Luther and the Reformers held that salvation is by grace through faith alone! **That remains our bold confession even today!** The phrase that describes this *sola fide*: **ONLY FAITH!**

SOLUS CHRISTUS

Solus Christus – **ONLY CHRIST**, is by far the most important. Everything about the Lutheran Reformation was about Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the World.

⁴ Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit within you. He is the One that opened your eyes so that you understand that the promise is true, and that you are included. Be sure not to understand faith in purely human ideas, such as your “decision” or you “accepting Jesus into your heart.” These kind of thoughts lead countless people down the road of works righteousness. Rather, Scripture is absolutely clear: “No one can say Jesus is Lord without the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3)”

During the Reformation days, people were taught that Christ was angry at them because of their sins; and they could not approach Him directly. They had to approach Him through a priest; they had to pray to Him through His mother Mary; they had to turn to the “saints” for good things.

Luther and the Reformers rejected this; they put the focus of the Holy Christian Church and every believer back on the Lord Jesus Christ. *Solus Christus* – **ONLY CHRIST** means that Jesus is front and center in everything that we believe, teach and confess.

He is the only Savior there is. There is no other name under heaven by which we may be saved. His life and His death are the only works that God accepts on your behalf. Christ alone is the Savior of the world!

Through His life, death and resurrection, you are declared righteous! You are redeemed! You have been given the gifts of forgiveness, life, and eternal salvation!

Far from being angry at you because of sin; He is loving, kind and compassionate and He came in to the world to rescue you from your sin! Christ alone is the Savior of the world! The most important theme of the Lutheran Reformation is *Solus Christus* – **ONLY CHRIST!!** **That remains our bold confession even today!**

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Finally, all of these **SOLAS** --- *sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*, and *solus Christus* --- they all lead us to the final *sola*: *Soli Deo Gloria* – **GLORY TO GOD ALONE!**

This is the doxology of the Lutheran Reformation! This is the culmination of all that God has done for us in Christ: we praise and thank God for His kindness to us in His Son Jesus Christ! *Soli Deo Gloria!* We realize that everything we are and everything we have is a gift from His good hand. Physical blessings **AND** eternal life come from Him. We look to Him for all good things and turn to Him in times of trouble. We believe, teach and confess that we are dependent on God alone; we praise and thank Him for His kindness to us in the Lord Jesus Christ! *Soli Deo Gloria* – **GLORY TO GOD ALONE!**

The Lutheran Reformation can be summarized in 5 phrases; the meaning of the Lutheran Reformation is captured in these five **solas**:

Sola Scriptura *Sola Gratia* *Sola Fide* *Solus Christus* *Soli Deo Gloria*

**May you know them, believe them,
and confess them to the world!**

AMEN!

Lord of all History, we thank you for the Reformation of the Christian Church. We thank you for bringing the Gospel of your Son to the forefront of the Church. We thank you for the men and women who boldly stood firm in their faith in the 16th century. We thank you that our congregation continues to lift high the cross of Jesus. Deepen our conviction of the doctrine and theology of the Holy Scriptures, so that we may remain faithful to You throughout our lives. Help us to rightly understand the Scriptures, Grace, Faith, and your Son so that we may glorify you ALONE in all things. We pray this in Jesus' Name, amen!

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

John 14:1-6

Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me