

The Five Solas: *Soli Deo Gloria*

1 Peter 4:7-11

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on October 29, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ One of the real highlights for me in doing this series on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is the opportunity to study the biography of certain principal actors within the Reformation and share it with you. This morning I'd like to make mention of two. The first was not a Reformer himself but a product of the Reformation.
 - ▶ **Johann Sebastian Bach**, the 18th-century German baroque composer is generally regarded as one of the greatest of all time. He was born in 1685 in a small German town called Eisenach – famous in Reformation history as being the site of the Wartburg Castle where Martin Luther took refuge after he defied the pope and refused to recant his views. It's also the castle where he translated the Greek NT into German. Needless to say, Bach was raised in a devout Lutheran family, and throughout his career his reformational convictions were a motivating passion.
 - Bach is famously known for inscribing, at the bottom of his compositions, the initials **S.D.G.** They were obviously not the initials of his name. They stood for *Soli Deo Gloria* – Glory to God Alone. Bach wanted everyone who appreciated his musical compositions to know that he wrote it – not for his praise but God's alone. Not for the fame of his name but God's name. Not for his glory but God's glory alone.

- ❖ The other reformational figure who embodied this principle of *Soli Deo Gloria* is the **French Reformer John Calvin**, who – without any premeditation or personal ambition – found himself as a leading figure of the Reformation as he pastored the church in Geneva, Switzerland. When in 1538, the Italian Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto wrote to the city magistrates of Geneva imploring them to return to the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin penned a magnificent response in just six days. It was this letter that really bursted him onto the public scene as a leading reformer.
 - ▶ In the letter, he urges Sadoletto to devote his life – as Calvin had already committed to do – to “*set before [man], as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God.*” **Illustrating the glory of God.** That's a great way to describe the life and ministry of John Calvin. If Luther is known foremost for the phrase “justification by faith alone”, Calvin is most known for “the glory of God”. That was his deepest concern. Everything in his theology, in his preaching and writing, was filtered through his singular ambition to illustrate the glory of God.

- ❖ ***Soli Deo Gloria* is the most fundamental of the Five Reformational Solas.** It's really the glue that holds together the other four. The Catholic Church may have never explicitly denied *Soli Deo Gloria*, like they did *Sola Scriptura* or *Sola Fide*. But if salvation is to be received by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, then that means there is no meritorious contribution on your part or that of a priest. So who gets the credit for salvation? Who gets the glory? God alone. And if Scripture is our final authority and not a pope or a magisterial teaching office or church tradition, then God, God's wisdom, God's Word gets all the glory.

- ❖ At the age of thirty, Calvin tried to picture what he would say to God at the end of his life. He imagined himself saying to God, *“The thing at which I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently labored, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice . . . might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ . . . might be fully displayed.”*
 - ▶ Twenty-four years later, at the age of 54, Calvin met his God, and I believe he achieved his great aim. In his last will and testament, he wrote, *“I have written nothing out of hatred to anyone, but I have always faithfully propounded what I esteemed to be for the glory of God.”* He could’ve just put on his tombstone S.D.G.

- ❖ Church, this morning I want to turn your attention to a text that calls for God’s people to do all things in life and ministry S.D.G. – for the glory of God alone. Our passages is 1 Peter 4:7-11. Before we go into it, let me provide the background context.
 - ▶ The book of 1 Peter essentially describes followers of Jesus by two sobering words. **We are ‘suffering sojourners’.** We’re sojourners (pilgrims) in this present age, knowing this is not our home. And we know it’s not our home because of the suffering we receive from the non-believing world. We’re suffering sojourners called to be persevere, urged to be prepared, born again to a living hope through the resurrection (1:3). Our living hope is that one day Christ will reappear (1:7). God will visit us again (2:12). And he will call us into his eternal glory in Christ and will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us in his kingdom forever (5:10-11).
 - That’s what keeps a suffering sojourner from throwing in the towel. From giving up the faith. That’s what keeps us going, knowing that at the end of all things awaits great, eternal glory in Christ.

- ❖ **So when we read in chapter 4:7 that “The end of all things is at hand” – just realize that it’s not supposed to be a foreboding, frightening warning.** When you hear someone today shouting “The end is near!”, you think – first of all, he’s crazy – but really he’s trying to scare me. He’s threatening me in some sense. **But to Peter’s original audience, hearing that the end of all thing is at hand would’ve been most welcomed news.** It would be a great relief.
 - ▶ Because they were living as strangers in a strange land that viewed their beliefs and practices to be – not only foolish and ignorant – but harmful to society. So they were heavily persecuted. They were suffering for the sake of Christ. **So to be told that the end of all this suffering is at hand is obviously good news.**

- ❖ Just to be clear, when Peter mentions ‘the end’, he doesn’t mean ‘the end’ as in a final cataclysmic act. But rather as in the last stage of a process. The biblical authors saw the Resurrection as signaling the end of history. **We’ve all been living in the end times, in the last stage of God’s redemptive plan.**
 - ▶ So the fact that this last stage has continued for almost 2000 years since Peter wrote v7, doesn’t mean he was mistaken about the timing of Jesus’s return. Peter’s not making a prediction in v7. He’s just stating a fact – a fact that remains just as true in 2017. The end of all things is still at hand.

- ❖ So it's still welcomed news to suffering sojourners living today. Thank God one day our suffering will end. But not only did Peter's audience long to be relieved of suffering, they longed to see God in all his glory. I consider vv7 and 11 to be two loaves sandwiching the meat of our passage. **The meat contains three exhortations for the Christian, and the motivation to live out these three things comes from considering the end and contemplating our chief end.** In other words, direct your attention to the end of all things and to the chief end of man, which is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.
 - ▶ Let me give you the three exhortations and then we'll consider each. 1) In light of the end (both the end of this age and the chief end of man), think clearly for the sake of your prayers. 2) In light of the end, love earnestly for the sake of your unity. 3) In light of the end, serve faithfully for the sake of God's glory.

Think Clearly for the Sake of Your Prayers

- ❖ The first exhortation is found in v7. Let me read it, "*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.*" Again, I put the exhortation like this: **In light of the end, think clearly for the sake of your prayers.**
- ❖ I know it sounds odd that, in light of the end of all things, Peter's first command would be a focus on prayer. **You'd think living in the light of the end would call for some kind of radical, extraordinary response.** Maybe for us to sell all our possessions and give to the poor. Or to move with our families to some tribal unreached people group and share the gospel. If everything we know is coming to an end, then we ought to do something huge.
 - ▶ Peter agrees. That's why he tells you to be self-controlled and sober-minded so you can better pray. Prayer is huge, and it does huge things because we're praying to such a huge and powerful God. But I understand, prayer still seems too ordinary considering the circumstances.
- ❖ But that's the point: **Living in light of the end of all things should be the Christian's ordinary mindset, and it should lead to the ordinary pursuit of common virtues (self-control and sober-mindedness) and the ordinary fulfillment of daily duties (prayer).**
 - ▶ When Martin Luther was asked what he would do if the end were to come today, he said he would plant a tree and pay his taxes. He was trying to make the same point. That is, he tried to live every day as if the end would come. So every day he would pursue whatever appointed task God gave him that day no matter how ordinary.
- ❖ So in this case, in v7, we're called to pursue self-control and a clear mind, especially in contrast to being in a state of drunkenness where you're not sober. Where you're neither clear-minded nor in control of yourself. But because the end is at hand – and according to chapter 5:8 the enemy is even closer prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour – therefore, think straight. Think clearly. **Be in control of your thought life, so you can more clearly perceive how the Resurrection of Christ and the coming Return of Christ reshapes your priorities, which will reshape how you pray.**

- ❖ Think about those who have survived near-death experiences – like a tragic accident or a battle with cancer. **These survivors often testify to how they now see things much more clearly.** When they realize the brevity of life, how every day could be their last, how the end of all things is at hand – they reprioritize their lives and they start praying for different things.
 - ▶ Where they once prayed primarily for themselves, for their own needs, for their own future – they start praying more often for others, for the needy, for the lost, for the unreached, for God and God’s global glory. **That’s what tends to happen when you realize that your chief end on earth is to pursue a happiness (a joy) that comes not from serving yourself but serving others.** Not from making a name for yourself but from exalting God’s name (glory) in your own life and among the nations.
 - That’s the connection between vv7 and 11. **Contemplating the end of all things and the chief end of man sharpens and shapes your priorities, especially when it comes to prayer.**

- ❖ So ask yourself: **What do I most commonly pray about?** Am I primarily asking God to help with my studies, my work? For physical healing or protection for myself or another? For wisdom and direction in the face of some big decision?
 - ▶ There’s nothing wrong bringing those requests to God. But how do we connect them to our chief end in life? **How do these requests advance God’s glory in our lives and in the world?** That’s what we need to think about clearly and theologically.
 - How does a prayer for help at school or at work advance God’s glory and not just my ambitions? How does a prayer for healing advance God’s glory and not just my comfort? How does a prayer for wisdom in decision-making advance God’s glory and not just my dreams and my concerns?

- ❖ And then on top of those prayers, commit yourself to be praying for our city – for its shalom, for Spirit-filled revival to take place. Start praying for the nations, for the glory of God to fill the earth, for peoples from every tribe and tongue to worship our great God and give him the praise he’s due. **Can you inscribe S.D.G. at the end of every one of your prayers?** That would be a healthy practice. That would greatly sharpen and reshape your prayer life.

Love Earnestly for the Sake of Your Unity

- ❖ That’s the first exhortation in this text. The second can be summed up like this: **In light of the end, love earnestly for the sake of your unity.** I see this in vv8-9, “*8Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.*”
 - ▶ Peter is a good student of human nature. **He knows that when external pressure and persecution increases for a group of people, internal problems will likely increase as well.** If just ten of you were to reside in this sanctuary, you’d probably have a swell time with each other because you’d have so much space and freedom. But if we crammed the ten of you into a broom closet, you’ll be disputing and complaining in no time. When pressures rise and your freedom is constricted, we tend to turn on each other instead of working with each other.

- ❖ Peter could foresee this happening to the early church. As suffering sojourners, they were being subjected to a great deal of pressure and persecution. In the next verse, he calls what they're going through a "*fiery trial*" (4:12). As the end draws near, suffering for Christ will increase, and there's a danger that those within the body of Christ will turn on each other.
 - ▶ So Peter exhorts them, above all, to keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. What does that mean? **It clearly doesn't mean your love for others is going to cover – in a saving sense – the multitude of sins in your life.** No, that would be a form of salvation by works, in this case, by how loving you are.
 - **That's antithetical to the gospel, which says that the multitude of sins you've committed over your life (and the multitude you'll commit from this point on until the end of your life) can only be covered – be paid and forgiven – by the love of Christ.** Who suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God (3:18). If you want the multitude of sins in your life forgiven, covered over by the blood of Christ, then tell God in your own heart how much you need Jesus and trust in Jesus.

- ❖ So what then does it mean for our love for each other to cover a multitude of sins? **It means the more we earnestly love each other, the more capable we are to overlook a multitude of sins committed against us while in community with others.** I think Peter is getting this idea from Proverbs 10:12. There it says, "*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.*"
 - ▶ In Proverbs we're clearly dealing with strife between people in community. Hatred simply fuels that strife and those self-serving, self-preserving feelings we naturally have. But when love – Christian love that is gifted by grace and empowered by the Spirit – when that kind of love abounds between us, then our sins are more easily overlooked and forgiven without need of confrontation.
 - If you always feel an incessant need to confront others every time you're offended by something they did or said – or if you have a very difficult time letting go and overlooking their offenses, then this verse is what God is speaking to you right now. This is a word from the Lord for you.

- ❖ **And knowing that the end of all things is at hand – that offers great motivation to take someone's sin against you and let it go, to cover it, and not let it destroy your unity.** How does that work? Just think about it. If you know the end is at hand and after that comes judgment (4:5), then you can leave the job of seeking justice to the just Judge of the universe.
 - ▶ You can rest in the fact that justice for all sins committed (particularly the ones committed against you) will be carried out perfectly. Justice will fall either on the head of the unrepentant sinner come Judgment Day or it already has fallen on the head of a Savior for the repentant in Christ. God's perfect justice is at hand.
 - **So don't let the root of bitterness grow between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ.** Since Christ has covered your sins against him, you can cover their sins against you. You can choose to break the cycle of always reacting to offenses. You can overlook them and move past them.

- ❖ **Now this doesn't mean there's never any room for confrontation within the body of Christ.** In Matthew 18, Jesus says if your brother (or sister) in Christ sins against you, go and tell him his fault. He lays out a whole process of confrontation and reconciliation between Christians within the church. So Peter is not saying (and I'm not saying) that you should never confront and bring to someone's attention their offense against you. But what we are saying is that gospel love enables you to cover over a vast multitude of such offenses.
 - ▶ **If the prime motive of your life is a zeal to illustrate the glory of God, then what better of an illustration than to forgive each other as Christ has forgiven you.** Probably the most powerful demonstration to the world that God is real and God is glorious – is when Christians practice forgiveness and maintain their unity.

Serve Faithfully for the Sake of God's Glory

- ❖ Let's consider our third and final exhortation found in vv10-11. We've put it this way: **In light of the end, serve faithfully for the sake of God's glory.** Let's read it again, *"¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace"*.
 - ▶ Let's stop there and make a few observations. The word for gift is the word *charisma*, which literally means a gift of grace. It's referring to what Christians commonly call 'spiritual gifts'. The NT teaches that Christ has given gifts, through his Spirit, to all of his people for mutual edification, or as Peter says, for us *"to serve one another"*.
 - ❖ Notice how v10 starts with, *"as each has received a gift"*, implying that every believer has at least one spiritual gift. **So there's no excuse *not* to be serving one another.** If you're a Christian and you're not actively serving the body of Christ, don't say it's because you're not gifted enough. If you have the Spirit of God in you, you have a *charisma* – a gift of grace.
 - ▶ And whatever gift you have, it's truly given to you by grace alone. You didn't earn it. You didn't manifest it yourself. You received it by grace. Notice how Peter speaks of *"God's varied grace"*, meaning there are various kinds of spiritual gifts that you may have that the brother next to you doesn't. Or the sister across from you may have been given a gift that you didn't receive.
 - That's how grace works. You can't hold it against God or complain. **The gifts belong to him and he gives them out, as he so chooses.** Your job is to be a good steward of his possessions, using them to serve each other. **Spiritual gifts are not privileges – they're responsibilities.**
 - ❖ Now let's keep reading in v11, *"¹¹whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."*
 - ▶ In Paul's letters, he goes into greater detail identifying particular gifts, but here I think Peter is just giving us two broad categories of *speaking gifts* and *serving gifts*. Under speaking gifts, you could include things that Paul mentions like teaching, exhortation (or encouragement), prophecy, tongues, and the interpretation of prophecy or tongues (cf. Rom. 12:6-7; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11).

- ❖ Under the category of serving gifts, you could include things like giving, leading, administrating, mercy, helps, healing, and miracles (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:9-10, 28-30). And at this point, I'm not even getting into the debate of whether all these gifts are still given today and considered normative in the church. **I'm just making the point that, if you're a Christian, you've been gifted by God to serve in some way – some of you more through words, some of you more through deeds.**
- ❖ If you're gifted with speaking gifts, then speak as if you're speaking oracles of God. That doesn't mean when I preach that I'm speaking new revelation (words) from God. **It means whatever I preach had better accord with God's revelation found in Sacred Scripture.**
 - ▶ You've got to ask yourself: When I give advice, am I just offering my wisdom? Am I just sharing my opinion? Am I just speaking my words? That's not good stewardship. Good stewardship of God's good gifts calls for much more. It calls for you to speak God's words, to be thoroughly biblical with your advice and counsel.
- ❖ **Now when you're dealing with serving gifts, the point is to serve out of God's strength and not your own.** In the NT the word for 'serve' is used in reference to particular actions partaken on behalf of others. The most frequent is providing a meal for someone, like when Peter's mother-in-law served Jesus a meal after he healed her (Mt. 8:15; Lk. 17:8; Acts 6:2). Other times serve refers to visiting someone in prison (Mt. 25:44; 2 Tim. 1:18). Or it could be talking about providing someone financial support (Lk. 8:3; Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 8:19-20)
 - ▶ The famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, is known for the saying, **"God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."** Now some would say that's theologically debatable if you're specifically talking about God's supply of financial resources. **But I think everyone would agree that the saying holds true when it comes to God's supply of spiritual strength to serve God and do his will.**
- ❖ **I think the reason many of us don't know what it's like to serve out of the strength that God supplies is because we only volunteer to serve within our areas of competency.** If I'm good with children, I'll serve in the children's ministry. If I'm a good speaker, I'll volunteer to share a testimony. If I don't think I'm very relational, then I'll avoid people ministries and just serve logistically behind the scenes.
 - ▶ Now I agree there's wisdom in serving out of your strengths. But sometimes, when needs are great, we ought to step out of what's familiar, what's comfortable, what's our area of competency – and serve where we're not as strong so that we're so much more desperate for the strength that only God supplies. So ask yourself: **What is one area of ministry – outside my natural strengths – where God might be calling me to serve totally out of his strength?**
- ❖ When we begin to speak depending on God's wisdom and serve depending on God's strength, then God through Christ receives all the glory. The Provider always gets the praise. So let's serve in such a way and with such an attitude that it's clear to all where our wisdom and strength comes from. May God alone get the credit. May he alone get the glory. S.D.G.