

Everything was going very well on the last day of our pastors' conference in Haiti. Suddenly, a fiery debate erupted. There was shouting -- and even a few stormed up to the front to try to take control of the pulpit.

Viewing the chaotic scene, I was reminded of one of the greatest debates since the New Testament. This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, a stubborn monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses or complaints against the Catholic church to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was a protest because the gospel had gotten buried under centuries of tradition and superstition.

At the heart of the movement were two questions: Where does religious authority lie, and how is a person saved? In answering these questions, the Protestant Reformers developed what would become known as the "Five Solas" (sola being the Latin word for "alone"). The Five Solas are as follows:

1. Sola Scriptura -- "Scripture Alone." The Roman Catholic church teaches that the foundation for faith and practice is a combination of the scriptures, sacred tradition, and teaching of the magisterium and the pope. The Protestant Reformers believed that the Bible alone is the sole authority by which all teachings and traditions of the church should be measured.

The Apostle Paul states it this way: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

2. Sola Gratia -- "Salvation by Grace Alone." The Catholic Church believes that we are saved through a combination of God's grace, the merits that we accumulate through penance and good works, and the surplus of merits that the saints before them accumulated. The Reformers believed that God's Word says we are rescued from God's wrath by God's sheer mercy. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

3. Sola Fide -- "Salvation by Faith Alone." The Catholic Church teaches that we are justified by faith and the works that we produce, and that God infuses grace in us which produces faith. The Reformers said: "No, the Bible teaches that we are justified by faith in Christ alone, not by the works of the Law." It is by faith in Christ that His righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect standard. (John 3:16-18)

4. Solus Christus -- "In Christ Alone." The Catholic Church teaches that we are saved by the merits of Christ and the saints, and that we approach God through Christ, the saints, and Mary, who all pray and intercede for us. The Reformation called the church back to faith in Christ as the sole mediator between God and man. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time." (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

5. Soli Deo Gloria -- "For the Glory of God Alone." The Catholic Church teaches that the glory for a sinner's salvation is attributed partly to Christ, partly to Mary and the saints, and partly to the sinner himself. The Reformation reclaimed the Scriptural teaching of the sovereignty of God over every aspect of the believer's life. "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-2)

Based on these revelations from God's Word, we are reminded how far we have drifted from the authority of God's Word. We are confident that most of our pastor friends in Haiti embrace these truths, but sadly we were not able to convince all of them. It is a pressing need for Christians everywhere -- and to my dear friends in Haiti -- to reaffirm and champion anew the "Five Solas" that were so well defended in the Protestant Reformation.

The same two questions must continue to be answered today: What is our ultimate authority and how do sinners get to heaven?

What do you believe?

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