

Our Reformation Heritage

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Preacher: Chuck Porter

[0 : 00] It's truly a pleasure to be here today. Thank you, Jason, for inviting me down. Would you please bow with me as we go to the Lord in prayer? Almighty gracious Father, since our whole salvation depends on our true understanding of your holy word, grant that our hearts, freed from worldly affairs, may hear and understand your word with all diligence and faith, so that we may rightly discern your gracious will, cherish it, and live by it with all earnestness.

To your praise and honor, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Would you please turn in your copy of God's word to Romans chapter 5, and we will read verses 1 and 2.

And please stand for the reading of God's word. And when I'm done reading, I will say, this is the word of the Lord, and your reply will be, thanks be to God.

Romans 5, 1 and 2 says this, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into his grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Political activist Marcus Garvey said this, A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.

[1 : 48] Friends, today we're going to take a brief look at our history and roots as God's covenant people. The verses in Romans we just read summarize well the heart of the Protestant Reformation.

And there's no better day than Reformation Sunday, and no better place than Reformed Heritage Church, to talk about our legacy that was birthed in the unlikely place of Germany.

Now, while tomorrow most of the nation will be celebrating Halloween, we as Protestants must remember that October 31st stands as one of the most important days in our history for the past 505 years.

Why is this? Because it was October 31st, 1517, that a young German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses, which was a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church doctrine, to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, sparking the move known as the Protestant Reformation.

So why the church door? Because at the time, the church door acted as a type of town bulletin board, a medieval Twitter, if you will.

[3 : 10] And Luther's 95 Thesis was an invitation to public debate with his fellow university professors over the sale of indulgences. And because the printing press had recently been invented, Luther's ideas were printed and spread rapidly throughout Europe.

So what prompted Luther? So visually picture this. A church built in the 4th century. It's called the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran Church and was built in honor of John the Baptist.

Above the entrance, the builders engraved these words, the mother and head of all the churches in Rome and all the world.

And these engraved words accurately express the authority that the Roman Catholic Church held over Europe for more than a thousand years. And at the time, for Luther, there was no other church in Europe.

And the Western world was dominated by the power of the Roman Catholic Church. It controlled and shaped all religious activity and heavenly influence politics in Europe since approximately 476 AD.

[4 : 30] Now, despite its power, there was a darkness within the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church. It was characterized by political intrigue, moral corruption, and Burdesen ritual.

The church had replaced the authority of Scripture with its own traditions and obscured the message of the gospel by making grace only available to the sinner if you did your part by works.

Now, as Luther studied the Scriptures, these corruptions troubled him. But his breaking point came through the work of a Dominican friar by the name John Tetzel.

Now, Tetzel was commissioned by the church to raise money for the ongoing construction of St. Peter Basilica in Rome. And Tetzel, like a door-to-door salesman, would move from town to town selling indulgences.

Now, indulgences were written promises from the Pope that if you purchased one, you or a loved one would get time reduced in purgatory. Tetzel would call out in an authoritative voice, As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.

[5 : 49] Now, Tetzel's falsity spurred Luther into action. So, let's take a minute to understand who Luther was.

Throughout history, Martin Luther has been portrayed as a simple or obscure monk. But in reality, at the time he posted his 95 Thesis, he was head of his monastery and the district superior over 11 other monasteries.

He had a master of arts and a doctorate in theology. Luther was known as a great preacher, lecturer, and teacher at Wittenberg University.

He was the first professor in Germany to lecture in the Bible's original languages of Hebrew and Greek. And he was also one of the first professors in Germany to lecture in the German language instead of the traditional Latin that was advocated by the Roman Catholic Church.

No, Luther was not a simple or obscure monk. So, what was his 95 Thesis? The 95 Thesis reflected Luther's great theological mind and would later become the foundation of the Reformation itself.

[7 : 07] It was written in a remarkably humble and academic tone, questioning rather than accusing, and the overall thrust of the document, nonetheless, for the time, was quite provocative.

The first two points of his Thesis contained Luther's central idea. One, that God intended believers to seek repentance, not penance, but repentance.

And second, that faith alone and not deeds would lead to salvation. The other 93 Thesis that followed supported these first two with a number of them directly criticizing the practices of indulgences.

Again, the 95 Thesis was intended to spark debate, to stir some soul-searching among his fellow brothers in the church.

And the 95 Thesis sparked far more than just a debate. It revealed the church was far beyond rehabilitation. It needed reformation.

[8 : 13] The church and the world would never be the same. The Protestant Reformation itself was a callback to biblical Christianity, to acknowledge that the authority on all matters, both for the church and believers, is God's word alone, and that sinful man is reconciled with God by faith in Christ alone.

It literally changed the European cultural, religious, social, and political landscape, and is often referred to as the birth of the modern age.

Although there were earlier movements in response to the corruption of the church, modern technology in the form of the printing press allowed for the dissemination of Protestant literature and the publication of the Bible in the vernacular, resulting in widespread support for the movement.

This brought an end to the monolithic religious, cultural, and political authority that the Roman Catholic Church had held on Europe. This evident corruption of the Roman Catholic Church had left the church's theological landscape as dry tinder, waiting for combustion, and Luther was the match. Though Luther ignited the fire that started the Reformation, God used Luther's work to influence other men in other countries. In the Swiss city of Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli was introducing reform on the basis of citizens reading the Bible.

[9 : 55] In England, William Tyndale was influenced by Luther's ideas, and he was working on translating the Bible into English, which actually he'd be burned at the stake for. John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, was writing and reforming the city into a literal city of God.

John Knox in Scotland adopted Luther's position on justification and helped write the Scottish Confession. Thomas Cranmer, Theodore Beza, Philip Melancthon, and other scholars and churchmen contributed to the Protestant Reformation that would reform all of Europe and the Western world.

Now, in the following years of Luther's ministry, he would continue to challenge the most powerful organization in the world on their authority and on their doctrine.

At the historic interrogation of Luther, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, where he was summoned by the church to recant of his writings, he answers his accusers this way, unless I am convinced by Scripture of the clear reason, of by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the Pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures that I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.

I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise.

[11 : 32] Here I stand. May God help me. Now, Luther's dramatic performance at the Diet of Worms ended any hope of reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church.

He was officially declared a heretic and an outlaw, which effectively was a death sentence at the time. Yet, despite this burden, Luther would go on to develop and refine his view of ecclesiology and the doctrines that would fuel the Protestant Reformation.

Now, although not written down in a tidy list as we have them today, what flowed out of Luther's writings and the writings of other reformers is what we know as the five solas.

These five Latin statements serve as a summary of the core beliefs that separate Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. And it captures the core of the gospel in all its graciousness and Christ-centeredness, just as we read about it in Scripture.

The five solas show the glory of God's gracious way of salvation in a way that sets the tone for us to have true theology, resounding in how we think and live in this world.

[12 : 49] Therefore, it's worth us studying and knowing them. Now, for clarity, the term sola in Latin simply means alone. So it's in these five scriptural points alone that we are saved, and they work together collectively.

So let's take a quick, brief look at these five statements. Our first sola, and the most important sola, I would say, is sola scriptura.

That Scripture alone is our standard. So would you please turn with me to 2 Timothy 3. I'll read 14 through 17.

Just follow along as I read. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[14 : 13] Friends, our theology must be scripturally grounded. God's life-giving speech reveals to us his salvation and calls us to faith and repentance.

The doctrine that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority was the formal principle of all the reformers during the Reformation. The God that commands light to shine out of darkness shines in our hearts, giving us the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We see that in 2 Corinthians 4. God always does this by the Spirit working through the Word. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures, and He speaks through the Scriptures.

The Scriptures teach us everything that we need to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ, and to be thoroughly equipped for every good works. Yet without the Spirit, even the Scriptures cannot help us.

We're dead in our trespasses and sins, and our minds and hearts are darkened. And we need someone to raise us from the dead and turn on the lights. We see that in Ephesians 5.

[15 : 25] If Scripture is sufficient to make us wise for faith and life in Christ, then Scripture alone can be our guide to walking with God. Our second sola is sola fide, that our justification is by faith alone.

Please turn to Galatians 3, and I'll read verses 6 through 11. Just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness, know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.

So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.

Now, it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith. Again, church, theology must be faith-driven.

[16 : 59] Without faith, it is impossible to please God. We see that in Hebrews 11, 6. Like the hand, like the empty hand of a beggar, faith reaches out to receive Christ.

By faith, we believe that he who is promised is able to perform that which he promises. God will fulfill his purposes, but if we do not believe, then we will not be established in his ways.

We are justified by faith without the works of the law, and we are not saved by good works, but are saved for good works. Knowledge of Christ through Scripture, assent to these truths in our minds, and spirit-wrought trust from our hearts characterize saving faith.

So knowledge, assent, and trust characterize saving faith. And we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

We see that in Galatians 2, 20. Our third sola is sola gratia, meaning salvation is by grace alone.

[18 : 18] Please turn to Ephesians 1, and I'll read verses 3 through 8. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved. In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight.

Again, church, our theology must be grace-saturated. If we are saved by faith, then we are saved by grace alone, not by works.

Grace is God's generous disposition by which he lavishes us with good things that we do not deserve. Everything we receive from God is by grace from our daily bread to our final resurrection.

[19 : 54] The grace of God is vested in Christ, and he alone gives saving grace. The Holy Spirit teaches us through Scripture that salvation is by grace alone because salvation is by faith in Christ alone.

Grace is not a sentimental idea leading us to ignore our sins, nor caring for how we live. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

We see that in Titus 2.11. Our fourth sola is Solos Christo.

By Christ's work alone are we saved. Please turn to 1 Timothy 2. We'll look at verses 5 and 6. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

Again, church, our theology must be Christ-focused. Christ is in the main point of the Bible, and the whole Bible itself testifies to him.

[21 : 38] Without the Spirit, we could not receive God's testimony in Scripture, and without Christ, even God's word could not save us. Theology is Christ-focused because no one comes to the Father apart from him.

We see that in John 14, 6. And because the Spirit seeks to glorify him for our salvation, Jesus is truly God and truly man.

He alone can reconcile God and man, killing the animosity between us and creating friendship. the Father. The Father is well pleased with his Son, and he is well pleased with us only when we are in the Son.

And he is well pleased with us. Excuse me. Jesus alone can save his people from their sins because he alone is our prophet, revealing to us by his word and spirit that the will of God is for our salvation.

He alone is our priest who offered himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice for us. And he alone is our king who rules and defends us.

[22 : 51] There is no fellowship with God apart from Christ, and we count all things as loss compared to the excellencies of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Philippians 3, 8. Our fifth and final sola, the sole Deo Gloria, for to God alone be the glory.

Please turn to Romans 11, verse 36. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. The Reformation reclaimed the scriptural teachings of the sovereignty of God over every aspect of the believer's life.

All of life is to be lived to the glory of God, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism asked this, what is the chief end of man? The answer being, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[24 : 07] Because we have nothing that we have not received, we should do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, keeping thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3, 17.

So if we go back to the beginning of our lesson today, and we think back to what Marcus Garvey said, a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots.

These five statements of the Reformation are our history, steering us back to our roots in our faith, and these teachings and beliefs are the collective pillars which uphold the biblical revelation of God's plan of redemption and the execution of that plan.

The five solas work together collectively, affirming through scripture, teaching us that the person and work of Christ are the sinner's only hope of escape from God's wrath.

self. The only way that any sinner receives the benefit of this work is through the application of it by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 21] Effectively, the Father plans redemption, the Son fulfills all the requirements for redemption, and the Spirit applies the benefits of redemption to each and every sinner who receives it.

The historicity of these statements should be known and studied because through them we know our family history is Protestants and the deep roots that provide the foundation of our saving faith. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for our family history and thank you for the men and women throughout your history who you have used to bring your flock back to be centered on you. For from you and through you and to you are all things. To you, Lord, be the glory of God forever. Amen.