

The Reformation (5) - To God's Glory Alone

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[0 : 00] Now, will you turn with me, please, to the passage in 1 Corinthians that we read, chapter 10. 1 Corinthians and chapter 10 and verse 31 especially.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. And we've looked at the solas of the Reformation, previously looked at four of them, Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, faith in Christ alone, and Christ alone or Christ only.

And the fifth one is this one, to the glory of God alone. Now, most of us have had the privilege of knowing the Shorter Catechism from the time that we were youngsters.

And especially that first question and answer in the Shorter Catechism. What is man's chief end? I know that as youngsters perhaps we're not really quite sure what that means, so let's explain to us. Chief end, of course, there means the chief purpose or reason for our existence. What is man's chief end? What is the purpose for our existence?

[1 : 23] And the answer, in a memorable way of putting it, is man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Both aspects of that are very important, and it's important that we keep them together. It's not just to glorify God. We don't just exist to glorify Him. We can only do that as we also enjoy Him, enjoy communion with Him and friendship with Him through Jesus Christ.

So, in many respects, this particular sola, this particular unto God, God's glory alone, is in many respects, in its own right, the most important of the solas of the Reformation.

Although the other ones are, of course, important in their own right too. But it really was zeal for the glory of God that drove the Reformation onwards.

And it's zeal for the glory of God that ought to, in our lives too, move us and motivate us in our daily lives, as well as in our worship of God, privately or together.

[2 : 31] Zeal for the glory of God is one of the great marks of the church as it's described in Scripture, of the individual believer as described in Scripture.

And just as it is in Scripture, so it is with ourselves, that at times we have to confess, all too often we have to confess, that our zeal for the glory of God is not as it should be, not as strong as it should be, not as applied to every area of life as it should be.

But that is really comprehensively stated in this one verse, which you could take as really an example, or maybe one of the main examples in the Bible, of all things to be done to the glory of God.

Whatsoever you do, whether you eat or drink, whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. Now there are three areas in which the Reformation applied this, and of course we're not dealing with this just as a mere history lesson, we're trying to expound the Scripture itself, and this particular verse in its application to our lives, and to what we participate in today.

And there are three areas, especially where the Reformers saw the glory of God, or doing things to the glory of God, as really important. That's why they set about reforming certain things in practice, and in the thinking of the people of the day.

[3 : 58] The first is the church. The church featured in what the Reformers were setting out to do and to accomplish. The reformation of the church was hugely important to them, because the church of the time was in such need of reformation.

So it was to be the church to the glory of God. Secondly, the home. The home to the glory of God. Because as we'll see, there were certain aspects, even of the church's teaching, which impinged directly on the home, but in a very negative way.

And so in terms of marriage and of rearing children, those things were emphasized by the Reformers as things which the Bible itself set forth to the glory of God.

The home to the glory of God. And thirdly, because it's really saying, whatever you do, do to God's glory, the state or the political order to the glory of God.

Everything to do with civil government was in the mind of the Reformers, taking it from the Bible, also to be shot through with this principle, that it was to be done to the glory of God.

[5 : 12] Whatever you do, do it to the glory of God. So let's look at these three. I'm going to look at the first two especially. I won't have time really to go into much of the third point in terms of the state or civil government.

But first of all, the church is to be to the glory of God in its activities, in its witness, and all that it sets out to do. And of course, that really has to do with a number of things.

But I'm going to focus again on two in terms of the church being to the glory of God. The soul of the Reformation focused on worship, first of all.

The worship of the church. The worship that we are involved with as we come together to worship God as a congregation. And in the worship of God, the Reformers emphasized, as we seek to emphasize, as I have an open Bible today in front of me, and as that is our practice and has been for generations, the Reformers emphasized in the worship of God the centrality of Scripture.

The centrality of the Bible, the Word of God. And not only was the Bible to be central in the way in which the church set out to glorify God, it was to be central in the way in which the language used, both in the translation of the Bible, of the Word of God, and in the practice of the church and its worship, was to be a language that everybody understood.

[6 : 37] Because, you see, at the time, people couldn't participate meaningfully, individually, or collectively in the services of the time because they were in Latin. And they were in Latin in such a way that had such an elaborate system of rituals and of statements and of things that were read out, mostly by priest or archbishop or whoever it would be, but the people were not really themselves able to participate because they did not have the Bible in their own language.

And that was one of the really supreme emphases of the Reformation, that people should have a Bible for themselves and that they should have it in their own language, in the language that they themselves understood.

Now, you can see from that how there really was a great emphasis and a great development of Bible translation. Where did our Bible translation actually come from in terms of how we see it today?

Well, it came from the emphasis in the Reformation that the Bible was to be in the vernacular and the language of the people so that they could read it and understand it for themselves, that it could be preached from in the language that they used and was common to all and that it was therefore understood on that level at least, understood.

Now, sometimes, perhaps we quibble today, here and there, about certain Bible translations. We maybe dispute how one translates certain passages of the original text of the Bible as against how another translation translates it.

[8 : 16] And sometimes, not very often for good reason, sometimes there are disputes about these things. Some of the disputes are very, are themselves legitimate, but we don't want to go into that just now.

But the point is this, just imagine if you were coming here today to worship God collectively, to gather together in a service of worship and you couldn't understand a thing that was being said. That was something to really quibble about, something to be annoyed about. But that was the situation that the Reformers faced. That was the situation in those days and why the church needed reform in terms of its worship.

Today, you and I are thankful. We have a Bible for ourselves. We have more than one copy of the Bible probably in our homes for ourselves. We have it in our own language, a language we can understand.

We come to church to listen to a sermon in our own language. We can read the Bible for ourselves in a language that we understand. That was due, that is due to the emphasis the Reformers gave to the centrality of Scripture in the worship of the church.

[9 : 22] And not only so, but in the worship of the church, it wasn't just to be the centrality of Scripture, it was to be congregational worship, congregational participation.

Because as we said, they weren't able to participate in the worship meaningfully, not just because of the language that was used, that they couldn't understand and follow, but because the practice

was that it was somebody who led the service that really pretty much did everything. Congregation didn't read things for themselves or follow a reading. They didn't even sing themselves. They were very ornate singings, usually left to choirs to actually carry out or groups to carry out.

the Reformers emphasized the worship of God is for the whole congregation. The congregation of a gathered people are not to be bystanders around a certain few individuals who do pretty much everything.

And in many respects, Martin Luther, who headed up the Reformation, as we've mentioned a number of times, and began the whole movement, if you like, at that great moment when he set up his theses on the church door, he really gave impetus to congregational singing as much as any other Reformer.

[10 : 45] He emphasized that the congregation needed to sing and needed to sing in participation with one another in the singing of praise to God. And that's why he set about composing many works that could be sung, and that's why from that time onwards, congregational worship, congregational singing, congregational participation in the singing of God's praise, and another aspect of the congregation's worship was also emphasized.

And even in the Scottish church, we've perhaps lost the practice of it, and maybe we need to restore some of that, is that the congregation, it's not a matter of actually selecting individuals to come and read the Bible other than the minister, or to give a short address other than the minister, it's not about that, but it's actually that together, for example, they read the Lord's Prayer, and spoke out the Lord's Prayer.

And that was something that was seen as both necessary and meaningful for a congregation together to be readers of God's Word, and not simply, most of the time, leaving it to be read by someone else, even if they're following him in the reading.

And the reading, and the expression of the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed sometimes as well. But these things were, especially scripture passages, important that congregationally we are engaged and we are involved in that.

Now it's great that in preaching we see yourselves whenever we come to a passage, you have your Bibles open, and are following perhaps other passages as well that relate to that as I or Kenny go through it or whoever's preaching, and that you actually turn over and follow that passage as we read it through.

[12 : 33] But it was just as meaningful, even more meaningful, and perhaps something we need to consider that whether it's just two or three verses, that we would actually just read out those verses together as a congregation.

Just simply to focus our mind even more on the fact, this is the Word of God, this is scripture central to our worship, central to what we're doing in giving glory to God, in honoring his name, and glorifying his name, and he has given us his Word, not so that we should be mute in regard to it, not so that we should leave everything to somebody else to do, but that we should be engaged as a congregation of worshiping people in the aspects of worship that we can be involved in.

So it was to be congregational worship. And then, of course, in relation to the church, to God's glory and its worship, you also had the sacraments. Sacraments, baptism, the Lord's Prayer had been buried under layers and layers of ritual.

Other sacraments had been added to it, or other practices called sacraments in the medieval church had been added to it. The reformers actually said there are two sacraments.

There's baptism, there's the Lord's Prayer. And we need to get back to the simplicity of the Bible in the way in which it sets out the simplicity of the sacraments too.

[13 : 53] The application of water in baptism, without any ornate ceremonial aspects to it. The celebration of the Lord's Supper, without taking away all the ornate things that the medieval church over generations had actually built up and gathered together and applied to the Lord's Supper.

Where the meaning of the Supper was really buried under the ritual of the Mass, and especially when it's in Latin and when the people can't understand it.

What meaningful purpose is there to have what the Bible calls a sacrament, an ordinance of God, a means of grace to our souls, when people can't participate in it meaningfully, when it's buried under layers of tradition and ornate practice, well the reformers said we've got to rescue this from all of these accretions that have been built around the simplicity of the practice itself.

And so the reformers would refuse to call the Lord's Supper, something as done on the altar of the Lord's Supper. It's not an altar, the reformers said, it's a table.

It's to be partaken of. It's a spiritual meal. So the word altar doesn't belong there. There's no sacrifice there. It's the memory, the remembrance, the memorial to a sacrifice that was accomplished at Calvary.

[15:20] But it was accomplished there. It was finished there. It's a done deed. And the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, do this in remembrance of me, is what Jesus said.

not in another offering of me on the altar of the Lord's Supper. You're doing it in remembrance of him, and you're doing it because here's a table where those elements that represent the death of Jesus are set out so that in remembering him, you can participate spiritually and feed your soul on everything that he has bought for you at such a cost.

That's what the reformers emphasized. And the same with the simplicity of baptism and the celebrant, the person administering the Lord's Supper, was not to be a priest dressed gloriously in vestments, but a minister of the gospel, who in a simple fashion gave the elements so that the people could actually partake meaningfully themselves.

So it's the church to the glory of God in its worship, but secondly in its government as well. See, one of the great questions for the reformers is, who is the head of the church?

And for hundreds of years, it had become commonplace to think of the head of the church as the pope in Rome. He's the head of the church. And as he's the head of the church, his word is law.

[16:53] And the reformer said, no, he's not the head of the church, not as any monarch, such as Henry VIII, or even today, Her Majesty the Queen has said to, you often hear her being spoken of as the head of the church of England.

Or maybe in one sense that's true, but in the main sense of it, it's not true at all. There is only one head of the church, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He alone is the head of the church. And no one else has the right to call themselves the head of the church, whether it's a minister or archbishop or elder or session, whatever.

Christ is the head of the church. Christ alone is the head of the church. We've been to ordinations of either elders or ministers. The same question actually is asked, whether it's the ordination of office bearers or of a minister or in any of these contexts.

And one of the questions asked is, do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, as king and head of the church, has therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers distinct from and not subordinate in its own province to civil government?

[18:10] You see what that's saying? I know these questions are sometimes long and they appear very elaborate and maybe we don't listen to them, they're just really for the person, we think it's just for the person being ordained.

Well, they're not. They are primarily for the person ordained because they're then making a confession in response to them. But they're for all of us because that question really says as it begins, do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed a government in the hand of church officers?

That he's done so as the head of the church? Who's appointed these men as elders here today wherever they're sitting? Who has appointed them? Well, you have elected them as a congregation but actually in the highest sense they have been appointed by the Lord.

They have been gifted by the Lord with certain qualities that you have recognized in order to actually appoint them as elders in the congregation. But they are appointed in the supreme sense by the Lord Jesus Christ and as a government of his church, as leaders of the church, as ruling elders of the church, that is where their authority comes from.

It's not from themselves. It's not from the possession of gifts. It's not from their personality. It's not from who they are in the community. It's not by their social status. It is Christ given and Christ appointed.

[19:27] That's what the reformers wanted to emphasize too, that church government is actually under the headship of Christ of his appointment. Now we need to, of course, recognize that we're all fallible as leaders of the church, that we don't always carry out our duties as we should, to the extent we should, to the quality of application, we should.

We acknowledge that, we confess that before God. We're fallible human beings. But we still have to recognize, and you all have to recognize, that the government of the church is an important thing.

So important that at ordination, the person being ordained in the presence of a congregation gives testimony to their belief that this is indeed what it is, an appointment of Christ to govern his church on earth.

He is the head, he is the Lord, and as so, he has appointed. So remember that when we do come eventually to the appointment, an election, an appointment of office bearers in the future.

You are actually looking at people who will be leaders in the church, especially in terms of the eldership, and these are appointed by Christ ultimately, through your selection of them, through your recognition that Christ requires a government in his church on earth by those that he has suitably endowed and gifted for that purpose.

[21 : 06] And then following on from that, the church's government involves the eldership of the church. I'm going to mention this just because we're in the process of looking towards an election which is now probably going to be in the new year at some point.

But what the reformers emphasized here is that as everything is to be done to the glory of God, so it is in terms of thinking of the church, how the church functions, what its functions are for, and in terms of the relation between those who lead and those who are led and those who have elected them to lead.

And the matter of plurality and equality was really important in the Reformation. Because in the medieval church, you didn't have the plurality and equality that grew out of the Reformation. You had an archbishop, you had a pope, you had archbishops, you had cardinals, you had all of these people with very, very powerful positions who could just sometimes order kings to go to war, who could order people to be executed.

Immense power. Power which was so often abused. To actually think of equality in leadership and to think of plurality as if everybody was really together ruling in the church, everybody that's in office that is.

[22 : 35] Well, that's what grew out of the Reformation because especially in our Presbyterian practice, what we have is a plurality and equality of eldership.

That means there is no one elder, whatever, experience. Of course, you give place to experience so that those who are younger in office actually give place to the experience of those who've been there before them.

All of that is just common sense. But it does not mean that one elder or two elders or whoever is actually superior in terms of authority than the others.

It's a plurality because they're all together as a leadership, as an eldership. But it's equality as well because the minister, while he is a preaching elder, as sometimes it's put, with a responsibility of expounding the word of God, in terms of authority, he's equal to the rest.

He's not above the rest. He moderates the Kirk session. That means he chairs the meetings of it. That doesn't give him any authority above the rest of the elders. That's the beauty of this plurality and the plurality and equality that's built into our Presbyterian system.

[23 : 54] Now, there wasn't necessarily a Presbyterianism immediately at the Reformation, but it grew out of that. And it's got, and especially, it came to be esteemed as very much what the Bible itself sets out.

That people who lead in the church as under Christ's headship do so with a plurality and equality. and I know that you're praying for us as elders in the church and that you're praying in regard to the forthcoming election as well, and that's so important because the church, as it grew out of the Reformation, as it was reformed in the Reformation, is something that really came pretty much to be valued in other parts of the world world and set up in terms of that model.

So, the church to the glory of God. I'm running short of time, but I just want to mention the home to the glory of God as well. Because, first of all, marriage in medieval times was not really regarded as something commendable.

You might think that's strange, but that's how it was. The medieval ideal was celibacy or on the part of females perpetual virginity or males as well.

That's why you had such an increase in monasteries and in nunneries because the medieval ideal was not marriage. It was singleness, it was celibacy, it was perpetual virginity.

[25 : 28] And the Reformers rejected this and emphasized the biblical ordinance of marriage. in such a way that was really revolutionary and Luther showed it because he got married and he married his beloved Katie as he would then describe her frequently afterwards.

He gave the lead in this and that meant that in the terms of the Reformation, marriage was seen as a partnership. Not that the husband didn't have a leadership role, but a partnership in the sense in which Calvin meant, when Calvin's wife died, this is one of the things he said, I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life, of one who, had it been so ordered by God, would not only have been the willing sharer of my poverty, but even of my death.

During her life, she was the faithful helper of my ministry. Many of us are thankful to God to be able to say something similar. A partnership in life, in the sharing of the issues of life, in the mutual support that a marriage should actually be about.

Now, of course, we live in times when we know that, although it's not new, that not every partnership lasts, whether it's through death or other reasons.

Sometimes, we find that that doesn't last for the whole of life. And that's something that we need to deal with pastorally, and that the church has always had to deal with pastorally. But the ideal is that in marriage, that is what takes place.

[27 : 04] It's a partnership. And that's why also out of, and it's especially interesting looking at it in terms of 1 Corinthians, the reformers emphasized that sexual relations within marriage was not improper and was in fact wholesome.

Because, you see, along with the idea of perpetual virginity and celibacy, went the idea that actually sexual relations even within marriage was not really clean. It was something not really commendable, something that was just allowed for but not really recommended.

The reformers said, no. God ordained marriage and the relation within marriage, the sexual relation within marriage, as something wholesome, something to be to his own glory when it is adhered to and carried through in the way that he himself commends.

And the reformers emphasized that. And, of course, that means that we are in such a bad situation today, badly in need of reformation, the reformation of the home as much as the church, the reformation of marriage and of sexual relations and of the bringing up of children as the reformers emphasized both the privilege and the challenge of that.

You see, this really was a revolution, not just in terms of ecclesiastically how the church was to be and how the church was to act, but in the home and it was to be to the glory of God that people saw marriage as a positive thing, not something as just an unwanted alternative to singleness and celibacy and perpetual virginity.

[28 : 44] Marriage as ordained of God and to the glory of God, in a home to be to the glory of God, in the rearing of children to the glory of God. You might be thinking, well, what about singleness?

What about a marriage that doesn't have or can't have children for whatever reason? Well, of course, the reformers recognized that and recognized that as a reality at times.

They recognized it as an exception where you have somebody who is not in a position to get married for whatever reason, who remains single for the duration of their lives, or, on the other hand, a couple who have married and are not able to have children again for whatever reason. The reformers recognized that as an exception to the usual, but not an abnormality. Not an abnormality.

And that's so important. They did not present singleness where it needed to be maintained as something not really commendable.

[29 : 59] In fact, they were very much aware of chapter 7 of this very epistle of Corinthians where Paul is saying singleness is actually a gift of God where it needs to be maintained.

Then it's a gift of God because through that chapter he talks about being distracted. and he says the person who is able to be single, contains themselves in singleness in a wholesome way, is not distracted from the service of God the way people tend to be in marriage.

Paul is not saying something against marriage there, but he is saying people who are married and who have children who have responsibilities in the home are obviously prone to more distractions. It's inevitable from the service of God.

Don't have the same amount of time for it, for one thing, as somebody who is single and devoted to God. That's how the reformers saw it. Singleness and childlessness.

While it was to be, while it is certainly an exception, it's not an abnormality. It itself is to be to the glory of God where one accepts that that is God's will and that is God's purpose for me, for you, for whoever it is.

[31 : 18] So we're back to the text. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. And we're not going to go into the third, which was in terms of the state or political order, but

that too was something where the reformers saw a need of reform, that that would be to the glory of God as well.

and I hope these few studies, very short as they've been, have shown us that we do need to keep applying these principles of the reformation to our lives today in church, in family, in state, in our society.

and it does show that we are in need of a reformation in all of these areas and certainly in terms of education, labor, political order, and economics, and in family life, and in social relationships, but not necessarily excluding in the church, of course, as well.

To all to God's glory. Let's pray. Almighty God, we give thanks for the way in which you enable us to live to your glory, though we confess that we come short of that ideal in so many ways.

Forgive us, Lord, we pray, for many areas in our lives in which we fail you, both individually, privately, and publicly, and collectively. We ask your forgiveness and your enabling of us by your grace that we will go on seeking to be more complete in our giving of ourselves to the glorifying of your name.

[32 : 58] For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, let's sing in conclusion now. We're singing from Psalm 96. Psalm 96 on page 358.

And we're singing verses 6 to 9. Great honour is before his face and majesty divine. Strength is within his holy place and there doth beauty shine.

Psalm 96 on page 358 and verses 6 to 9. To God's praise. great honour is before his face and majesty divine.

Strength is within Jonah digital offspring. Kingmez FL Display how to hum title and ■■ thy heh same and■■ Do ye establish through the law all people and entry of their heaven and unity Alberflash porque she loves■ be Glory do ye unto the Lord, that mighty power ascribe.

Give ye the glory to the Lord, that to his name is due.

[34 : 58] Come ye into his courts and bring an offering with you.

In beauty of his holiness, O do the Lord adore.

Likewise let all the earth through a tremble his face before.

If you let me get to the main door, please, after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.

Amen.