

# Christ A L O N E

THE UNIQUENESS
OF JESUS AS SAVIOR

What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters

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# A Note from the Series Editor

What doctrines could be more foundational to what it means to be an evangelical Protestant than the five *solas* (or *solae*) of the Reformation? In my experience, however, many in evangelical churches today have never heard of *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), *solus Christus* (by Christ alone), and *soli Deo gloria* (glory to God alone).

Now it could be that they have never heard the labels but would recognize the doctrines once told what each *sola* means. At least I pray so. But my suspicion is that for many churchgoers, even the content of these five *solas* is foreign, or worse, offensive. We live in a day when Scripture's authority is questioned, the exclusivity of Christ as mediator, as well as the necessity of saving faith, is offensive to pluralistic ears, and the glory of God in vocation is diminished by cultural accommodation. The temptation is to think that these five *solas* are museum pieces of a bygone era with little relevance for today's church. We disagree. We need these *solas* just as much today as the Reformers needed them in the sixteenth century.

The year 2017 will mark the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. These five volumes, each written by some of today's best theologians, celebrate that anniversary. Our aim is not merely to look to the past but to the present, demonstrating that we must drink deeply from the wells of the five *solas* in order to recover our theological bearings and find spiritual refreshment.

Post tenebras lux

Matthew Barrett, series editor

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### **Foreword**

Five hundred years on from the Reformation, there is much to encourage and much to trouble those of us who count ourselves among the heirs of the Reformers. At the same time that the key principles of the Reformation are being forgotten, derided, and attacked at large, we see Reformational teaching faithfully and clearly expounded by an impressive regiment of scholars and preachers.

Yet for all the fresh re-exposition of Reformation theology in our day, there is a danger that it could be distorted into a theological system abstracted from Jesus Christ. The principle of Christ alone (*solus Christus*) remains as a critical bulwark against that danger—a guardian of the essence of that for which the Reformers fought.

Solus Christus expresses the biblical conviction that there is "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5 ESV), and that therefore "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 ESV). Christ's identity is absolutely exclusive and his work entirely sufficient. We have no need, then, for any other prophet to provide us with a new revelation, any other priest to mediate between us and God, or any other king to rule Christ's church. Christ alone stands at the center of God's eternal purposes, Christ alone is the object of our saving faith, and therefore Christ alone must stand at the very center of our theology. Stephen Wellum is therefore perfectly right when he argues here that solus Christus is the linchpin of Reformation theology and the center of the other four principles or solus of the Reformation.

Solus Christus is the principle that, if followed, will ensure that we today are as robustly and thoroughly Christian—as anchored in Christ—as the Reformers. It protects us from becoming what Martin Luther termed "theologians of glory" who assume fallen human ideas

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of God, grace, faith, and Scripture. *Solus Christus* can keep us instead as epistemically faithful and humble "theologians of the cross."

In particular, *solus Christus* protects us when we think of grace alone (*sola gratia*) from thinking of grace as a blessing or benefit that can be abstracted from Christ. (That was very much the problem with medieval Roman Catholic conceptions of grace, and remains a problem today where justification and sanctification are divorced.) *Solus Christus* protects us when we think of faith alone (*sola fide*) from thinking of faith as a merit in itself or as a mystical mood or thing without an object. Faith is only that which grasps Christ, in whom is all our salvation. *Solus Christus* is the interpretative key to Scripture so that as we accept Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) as our supreme authority, we know how to read it. And *solus Christus* ensures that it is the glory of the *living*, *triune* God we seek when we assert that we think and do all for the glory of God alone (*soli Deo gloria*).

I am therefore delighted to see this superbly cogent exposition and application of the doctrine of *solus Christus*. Stephen Wellum clearly and methodically argues for the exclusivity of Christ's identity and the sufficiency of his work (and in so doing makes an outstanding case for the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ). He also proves just how vital it is for us today to stand firm on both.

The church—indeed, the world—needs the great truths presented so well in this book. For through them we see the brilliant glory of a unique and supersufficient Savior. His is the light and glory that we happily envisage when we hold up that banner of the Reformation: *post tenebras lux* ("after darkness, light"). His is the only light that can drive away the darkness of this world. And so for his glory and for that end, we must have—and we rejoice to have!—these truths shine out today.

#### Michael Reeves

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# Introduction

Reformation theology is often summarized by the five solas. Scripture alone (sola Scriptura) stands as the formal principle of the Reformation and the foundation of all theology. God's glory alone (soli Deo gloria) functions as a capstone for all Reformation theology, connecting its various parts to God's one purpose for creating this world and humanity in it. In between these two solas, the other three emphasize that God has chosen and acted to save us by his sovereign grace alone (sola gratia), through faith alone (sola fide), which is grounded in and through Christ alone (solus Christus).

If we are to learn from the Reformers, we do well to begin with these summarizing *solas*. But if we are to understand the substance of the Reformation *solas* and profit from them, we must bear in mind two points. First, all of the *solas* are interrelated and mutually dependent; you cannot have one without the others. Second, the five *solas* are just as important today as they were in the Reformation for capturing what is at the heart of the gospel. Without minimizing this mutual dependence, however, we will also need to consider that one *sola* plays a distinct part in connecting the others to bring us the full glory of God in the gospel.

*Solus Christus* stands at the center of the other four *solas*, connecting them into a coherent theological system by which the Reformers declared the glory of God. For this reason, we need to attend closely to what the Reformers taught about our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the words of John Calvin:

For how comes it that we are *carried about with so many strange doctrines* [Heb 13:9] but because the excellence of Christ is not perceived by us? For Christ alone makes all other things suddenly vanish. Hence there is nothing that Satan so much endeavours to accomplish as to bring on mists with the view of obscuring Christ, because he knows, that by this means the way is opened up for every

kind of falsehood. This, therefore, is the only means of retaining, as well as restoring pure doctrine—to place Christ before the view such as he is with all his blessings, that his excellence may be truly perceived.<sup>1</sup>

While the entirety of Reformation Christology lies beyond the scope of this book, we can begin to recover the Reformers' basic insights by focusing on two teachings: the *exclusive identity* of Christ and his *sufficient work*. These two aspects of Christology, while basic to the Reformers' theology, have been ridiculed and rejected by many today. And that is why, if the church is to proclaim the same Christ as the Reformers, we must understand and embrace *solus Christus* with the same clarity, conviction, urgency, and abundance of joy. To do this, we need to consider more closely why *Christ alone*<sup>2</sup> is at the center of the Reformation *solas* and at the heart of Christian theology.

First, Christ alone is the linchpin of coherency for Reformation doctrine. We come to know the person and work of Christ only by God's self-disclosure through Scripture. Yet, God speaks through the agency of human authors not simply to inform us but to save us in Christ alone. We are saved through faith alone. But the object of our saving faith is Christ alone. Our faith in Christ guards us by the power of God and his grace alone. The purpose of God's grace, however, leads to and culminates in our reconciliation and adoption through Christ alone. In the end, the ultimate goal of God in our redemption is his own glory, even as we are transformed into a creaturely reflection of it. And yet, the radiance of the glory of God is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. The word spoken by God, the faith given by God, the grace extended by God, and the glory possessed and promised by God cannot make sense apart from the Son of God who became a man for our salvation.

Second, the Reformers placed Christ alone at the center of their doctrine because Scripture places Christ alone at the center of God's eternal plan for his creation. Despite the diversity of human authors, Scripture

<sup>1.</sup> John Calvin, Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (1844–1856; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), Col 1:12 (emphasis original).

<sup>2.</sup> Hereafter, "Christ alone" (italicized) refers to the Reformation doctrine of solus Christus. Without italics, "Christ alone" refers to a particular characteristic, act, accomplishment, or other predicate that is true of no one but Christ.

speaks as a unified divine communicative act<sup>3</sup> by which God reveals himself and the whole history of redemption—from creation to new creation. And this unified word of God has one main point: the triune God of the universe in infinite wisdom and power has chosen to bring all of his purposes and plans to fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. The centrality of Christ does not diminish the persons and work of the Father and the Spirit. Scripture teaches, rather, that all the Father does centers in his Son and that the Spirit works to bear witness and bring glory to the Son. So we can agree with Michael Reeves that "[t]o be truly Trinitarian we must be constantly Christ-centered."4

Third, the Christ alone of the Reformation reflects the self-witness of Christ himself. Jesus understood that he was the key to the manifestation of God's glory and the salvation of his people. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained his death and bore witness to his resurrection as the Messiah by placing himself at the focal point of God's revelation: "'Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:26–27).<sup>5</sup> He confronted the religious leaders for not finding eternal life in him as the goal of humanity: "'These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life'" (John 5:39-40). And he was remarkably clear-minded and comfortable in his role as the anointed one entrusted with the end of the world: "'The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him" (John 5:22-23). To follow Jesus as his disciples, then, the Reformers confessed that Christ alone is the person around whom all history pivots and the focus of all God's work in the world.

Fourth, the Reformers emphasized the centrality of Christ alone because they accepted the apostolic witness to the person and work of Christ. The opening verses of Hebrews underscore the finality and superiority of God's self-disclosure in his Son: "In the past God spoke . . . at many

This term is taken from Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in NDBT 3. 52-64.

Michael Reeves, Rejoicing in Christ (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 23. 4.

Unless otherwise noted, all references are taken from the NIV.

times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being . . ." (Heb 1:1–3a). Paul comforts us with the cosmic preeminence of Christ: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16–17). And Paul encourages our hope in Christ by declaring that God's eternal purpose and plan is "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Eph 1:9–10). In other words, Jesus stands as *the most important figure* in God's new creation work—a work that restores and even surpasses what was lost in Eden. God brings forth a new redeemed and reconciled heaven and earth by and through Christ alone.

Fifth, beyond the other Reformation solas, Christ alone is the linchpin of coherency for all Christian theology. More than a century ago, Herman Bavinck wrote his magisterial Reformed Dogmatics. In this masterful integration of Christian teaching, Bavinck kept his eye on the key to its coherency: "The doctrine of Christ is not the starting point, but it certainly is the central point of the whole system of dogmatics. All other dogmas either prepare for it or are inferred from it. In it, as the heart of dogmatics, pulses the whole of the religious-ethical life of Christianity."6 In the late twentieth century, J. I. Packer used the helpful analogy of a central hub that connects the spokes on a wheel. Packer helpfully explained that "Christology is the true hub round which the wheel of theology revolves, and to which its separate spokes must each be correctly anchored if the wheel is not to get bent."<sup>7</sup> And most recently, theologians like Michael Reeves recognize the integrative force of Christ alone. Reeves urges that "the center, the cornerstone, the jewel in the crown of Christianity is not an idea, a system or a thing; it is not even 'the gospel' as such. It is Jesus Christ."8 In short, all of our efforts at theology ultimately rise and fall with Christ alone. Only a

<sup>6.</sup> Herman Bavinck, Sin and Salvation in Christ, vol. 3 of Reformed Dogmatics, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 274.

<sup>7.</sup> J. I. Packer, "Jesus Christ the Lord," in *The J. I. Packer Collection*, comp. Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 151.

<sup>8.</sup> Reeves, Rejoicing in Christ, 10.

proper understanding of Christ can correctly shape the most distinctive convictions of Christian theology.<sup>9</sup>

Four quick examples will give us a better grip on the centrality of Christ to Christian theology. One of the most distinctive teachings of Christianity is the doctrine of the Trinity. Still, this fundamental of the Christian faith comes fully to us by the divine Son's incarnation. The church confesses the triunity of God because Scripture reveals the coming of God the Son as a man in eternal relation to the Father and the Spirit. Christ alone opens our eyes to see the Father, Son, and Spirit working distinctly yet inseparably as the one Creator-Covenant Lord. Being human, we might see the doctrine of humanity as intuitive, easily accessible and comprehensible on its own. But we cannot understand who we are in all of our dignity and fallenness apart from comprehending the person and work of Christ. Christ alone is the image of God, the last Adam, the beginning and end of humanity. And Christ alone is the hope of humanity. The doctrine of salvation brings us even closer to the center of theology because it brings the other doctrines to intersect as God's eternal plan progresses to its end. And yet again, even more clearly now, it is Christ himself, unique in his person and sufficient in his work, who makes sense of the why and how of divine-human reconciliation.

Finally, at the heart of the gospel stand the cross of Christ and the doctrine of the atonement. In his classic work, The Cross of Christ, John Stott argues that fully understanding the biblical language regarding the death of Christ requires correct conclusions regarding the person of Christ and especially making sense of the cross as penal substitution. <sup>10</sup> After surveying a number of options in Christology, Stott draws this crucial conclusion: "If the essence of the atonement is substitution . . . [t]he theological inference is that it is impossible to hold the historic doctrine of the cross without holding the historic doctrine of Jesus Christ as the one and only God-man and Mediator. . . . At the root of every caricature of the cross lies a distorted Christology. The person and work of Christ belong together. If he was not who the apostles say he was, then he could not have done what they say he did. The incarnation

<sup>9.</sup> Packer, "Jesus Christ the Lord," 151.

<sup>10.</sup> See John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 149–62.

is indispensable to the atonement." Also, by understanding Christ's substitutionary death, we can look through his atonement to gain still more clarity in all other doctrines: for example, the problem of human sin; the mercy and grace of God in sending his Son; the wisdom and goodness of God in his redemptive plan; God's sovereign power in overcoming evil and restoring his creation. The glory of God in all his ways depends upon Christ alone.

Simply put, *Christ alone* must connect all the doctrines of our theology because Christ alone stands as the cornerstone of all the purposes and plans of God himself. But if we misinterpret who Christ is and what he does in his life, death, and resurrection, then all other doctrines will likely suffer. Retrieving and learning from the Reformers' teaching on *solus Christus*, then, brings both sobriety and joy. Misidentifying Christ will cause confusion in the church and harm our witness in the world. However, if we rightly identify Christ in all his exclusive identity and all-sufficient work, then we can proclaim the same Christ as the Reformers with the same clarity, conviction, urgency, and abundance of joy.

Christ alone is not a slogan; it is the center of the solas by which the Reformers recovered the grace of God and declared the glory of God. Christ alone integrates the purposes and plans of God as he has revealed them in Scripture and as we represent them in theological formulation. Yet we cannot afford to pursue Christ alone as a mere academic interest. We must proclaim the excellencies of Christ alone "who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9b). Living under the Lordship of Christ, it is our privilege to follow Paul and "proclaim [the supremacy of Christ alone], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). For this proclamation, we want to stand with the Reformers to declare and delight in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.

The goal of this book is to learn from the Reformers' solus Christus so that we might proclaim the same Christ in our context today. Exploring the fullness and richness of this glorious Reformation doctrine is a lifelong pursuit—and well worth the effort. Our guide to understanding the basic insights of the Reformers is to focus on two

<sup>11.</sup> Ibid., 159. On this same point, see Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 29.

teachings: the exclusive identity of Christ and his sufficient work. But our focus is not the Reformers themselves—it is to grasp that their teaching on Christ alone is worth recovering because it encapsulates the teaching of Scripture. Ultimately, we want to follow the Reformers to proclaim who Christ is and what he has done according to what Scripture says about him. So we need to spend time looking at the identity and work of Christ as they are presented in the Scriptures, and we need to take seriously the differences between the cultures and contexts of the Reformation era and our day. Theology is never constructed or communicated in a cultural vacuum. As we pursue Christ alone for today, we must avoid the particular pitfalls that are presented by the dominant patterns of thinking, and we must embrace the responsibility of meeting the challenges imposed by that thinking on our witness to the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ.

Part 1 of this book establishes the exclusive identity of Christ from the storyline of Scripture. The first chapter traces the Bible's storyline according to its structures, categories, and intratextual dynamics to arrive at the biblical identity of Christ. The covenantal development of the biblical storyline helps us grasp who Jesus is and what he has done for us and our salvation. Chapter 2 considers the self-witness of Christ that he is God the Son incarnate. From his baptism through his life, death, and resurrection unto the inauguration of God's kingdom, Christ knew his divine-human identity and the authority given to him. He knew that he would accomplish the works of God and receive the praise of man. Chapter 3 confirms the self-witness of Christ by considering the witness of his apostles. Looking at a few key texts, it becomes clear that the apostles knew Christ as the promised God-man. Moreover, the apostles confessed this exclusivity of Christ not just because he told them but because he opened their hearts and minds to see and receive the revelation of God developed through the OT—on the Bible's own terms. Finally, chapter 4 begins the transition from a focus on Christ's person to a focus on his work by connecting them in the incarnation. The incarnation and the incarnate Son's life and death reveal who Jesus is and how his divine-human identity is necessary to accomplish our reconciliation.

Part 2 takes up the sufficiency of Christ in Scripture to determine the nature and necessity of his sacrifice. Chapter 5 follows the typological development of the biblical storyline to find Christ as our peerless prophet-priest-king. Through this one threefold office, Christ alone brings us into his all-sufficient revelation, mediation, and lordship for a comprehensive salvation. Chapter 6 looks more closely at the sufficiency of Christ's atonement on the cross. A brief survey of different atonement theories demonstrates that the Reformers brought a key insight into the debate: what we say about the atonement must align with who God has revealed himself to be. In the end, the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work is determined by who he is and the identity of God himself. And chapters 7 and 8 argue for penal substitution as the atonement theory that best accounts for the biblical presentation of Christ's sufficient work. Looking at Jesus's own understanding, the work required for our forgiveness, and the various perspectives on the cross in Scripture, we can conclude that Christ became our substitute to bear the penalty for our sins as an absolute necessity of God's determination to save us. And because he is God the Son incarnate, Christ's sacrifice was perfect and its effect was sufficient to accomplish all that God planned and promised. The penal substitutionary death of Christ propitiates God's wrath, redeems and reconciles a sinful people, presents them justified before God, gives Christ the victory over all God's enemies, and gives us an example for our own lives.

Part 3 concludes by looking at why the Reformers taught Christ alone and how intellectual shifts over the last five hundred years have created a different cultural context for us. These shifts have not changed who Christ is and what he has done for us, and they have not removed the duty and joy of knowing, praising, and proclaiming his exclusivity and sufficiency. But today's intellectual culture does present unique challenges. Chapter 9 highlights the Reformers' continuity with orthodox Christology, and chapter 10 explains their special focus on Christ's sufficiency as a reaction to Rome's sacramental theology. Chapter 11 proposes that while we must always maintain the sufficiency of Christ, we must now specifically argue for his exclusivity, something the Reformers simply assumed along with the entire Christian tradition. The reason why this is so is due to a shift in plausibility structures that determine whether people will accept something as probable or even possible. Since the Enlightenment, there has been a shift from an acceptance of orthodox Christianity to a rejection of its basic tenets that

has greatly impacted our confession of *Christ alone*. Chapters 11 and 12 focus on this shift, first in the Enlightenment and second in our own postmodern era, followed by suggestions on how to proclaim faithfully an exclusive and all-sufficient Christ today.

Finally, I will offer some closing comments on how the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ alone applies to our Christian lives. As God the Son incarnate, Christ deserves and demands our total allegiance. All we think, feel, do, and say should be given exclusively to Christ alone and governed by his Spirit as worship. And by the sufficiency of his work, Christ supplies our every need in abundant and eternal life. The new covenant accomplishments of Christ merit every spiritual blessing to strengthen us for joyful obedience in the world unto the consummation of his kingdom over the world.

From beginning to end, this book confesses with the Reformers that Jesus Christ bears the exclusive identity of God the Son incarnate and has accomplished an all-sufficient work to fulfill God's eternal plans and establish God's eternal kingdom on earth. We confess both the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ alone because Scripture reveals that "[w]hat Christ has done is directly related to who he is. It is the uniqueness of his person that determines the efficacy of his work." Just as the five solas are mutually dependent, the exclusivity and sufficiency of Christ alone are bound together to bring us fullness of joy in covenant with God.

May *Christ alone* fill our hearts with wonder and thanksgiving and open our mouths for praise and proclamation. And may this work encourage the church to love and follow Christ alone, especially in the tests of faith, until he comes again: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:8–9).

<sup>12.</sup> Letham, Work of Christ, 24.

#### CHAPTER 1

# The Biblical Identity of Jesus Christ

Our understanding of who Jesus is and what he does must be developed from Scripture and its entire storyline. And while the full complexity of the Bible's structure, categories, and intratextual dynamics lies beyond the scope of this volume, I the Bible's own terms provide us with a clear picture of Christ's identity and work: Christ alone is Lord and Savior, and therefore he alone is able to save and his work is all-sufficient.

There are four major pieces to the puzzle of Christ's identity and his accomplishments: who God is, what he requires of humans, why sin creates a problem between God and humans, and how God himself provides the solution. These four pieces fall into place as the biblical covenants develop across time to reveal Christ in the fullness of time. The covenantal storyline of Scripture unfolds both God's plan of redemption and the identity of Christ who accomplishes it. Over the next few chapters we will consider the teaching of Jesus himself and his apostles, but first we will consider how the structure and storyline of Scripture create the expectation and necessity that the Christ will bear a specific, exclusive identity. This covenantal storyline reveals both the necessity and identity of Christ and his work as the one person who (1) fulfills God's own righteousness as a man, (2) reconciles God himself with humanity, and (3) establishes God's own saving rule and reign in this world—all because, and only because, Christ alone is God the Son incarnate.

<sup>1.</sup> For further discussion on this point, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 21–126.

#### The Necessity of Christ and His Work for Our Salvation

The structure and storyline of Scripture reveals the necessity of Christ and his work. At the heart of solus Christus is the confession that the salvation of humanity depends upon the person and work of Christ. Necessity is a tricky concept in theology. To say that Christ is necessary for salvation is true in a number of ways, some of which can mean things that are unbiblical. Our immediate task is to define in what way Christ is necessary.

Anselm begins his famous Why God Became Man with these words: "By what logic or necessity did God become man, and by his death, as we believe and profess, restore life to the world, when he could have done this through the agency of some other, angelic or human, or simply by willing it?" As Anselm practices a "faith seeking understanding" by wrestling with the why of the incarnation and the cross, especially in light of the awful cost both were to the eternal Son, the question of necessity naturally arises. Was the incarnation and the cross merely one of God's chosen ways to save us, or was it the only way? Could the triune God, in his infinite knowledge and wisdom, have planned another way to save fallen creatures? Or were Christ and his work the only way? This is the question of necessity. Walking in the footsteps of Anselm today, John Murray also stresses the importance of Christ's necessity: "To evade [questions of necessity] is to miss something that is central in the interpretation of the redeeming work of Christ and to miss the vision of some of its essential glory. Why did God become man? Why, having become man, did he die? Why, having died, did he die the accursed death of the cross?"3

These questions demand some kind of explanation, not only for the sake of the church's theology in general but to warrant and establish Christ alone in particular. Why is Christ the unique, exclusive, and allsufficient Savior? Scripture answers: because he is the only one who can meet our need, accomplish all of God's sovereign purposes, and save us from our sin. Christ and his work are necessary to redeem us, and apart from him there is no salvation. But what exactly is the nature of

Anselm, Why God Became Man, in Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I:1.

John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 11.

this necessity? Since there are a range of options, we can first reject the extremes and then focus on the remaining two possibilities.

On one end of the necessity issue, some argue that our salvation does not require the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In what we might call optionalism, God is able to forgive our sin apart from any specific Savior acting on our behalf to satisfy God's righteous demand. In the Reformation era and beyond, this view is found in Socinianism, various forms of Protestant Liberalism, and present-day religious pluralism. In all of its forms, optionalism argues that God's justice is a non-retributive, voluntary exercise of his will uncoupled from his nature. God is under no necessity to punish sin in order to forgive us. On the other extreme stands the hypothetical view of fatalism. Fatalism argues that God is under an external necessity to act as he does in salvation. This view removes our salvation in general and the entire Christ event in particular from the sovereign freedom of God. He is bound not by his own divine nature and character but by some standard external to God. The standard for God's actions is not God himself. Both extremes, however, err in the same way. Optionalism and fatalism both fail to understand the nature of God and the biblical presentation of his plan of salvation in Christ.

Beyond the extremes, within historic orthodox theology two options remain: *hypothetical* necessity and *consequent absolute* necessity. Throughout church history, many fine theologians have affirmed the hypothetical necessity of Christ and his work for our salvation.<sup>4</sup> This view argues that Christ is necessary because God in fact decreed that salvation would come through Christ as the most "fitting" means to his chosen ends. But this necessity is hypothetical because God could have chosen some other way of salvation.<sup>5</sup>

The other orthodox option is consequent absolute necessity, the view favored in post-Reformation theology.<sup>6</sup> This view argues that *consequent* 

<sup>4.</sup> Notable advocates include Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and Hugo Grotius. For further discussion of the hypothetical necessity view, see Murray, *Redemption*, 9–18; Oliver D. Crisp, "Penal Non-Substitution," *Journal of Theological Studies* 59:1 (2008): 145–53.

<sup>5.</sup> On this point, see Murray, *Redemption*, 11–12; Crisp, "Penal Non-Substitution," 145–53; Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 45–132.

<sup>6.</sup> Notable advocates include John Owen, Francis Turretin, and more recently, John Murray and Donald Macleod. See Murray, *Redemption*, 11–18; Donald Macleod, *Christ* 

to God's sovereign, free, and gracious choice to save us, it was *absolutely necessary* that God save us in Christ alone. There was no Christless and crossless way of salvation after God made the decision to save sinners. Obviously, the absolute sense of necessity is stronger than the hypothetical sense. Simply put, the view of consequent absolute necessity claims that while God was not obliged to redeem sinners, once he did decide to redeem us, there is no possible world in which that redemption could be accomplished apart from the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of God the Son.

Historic Christianity has affirmed both of these understandings of necessity, so this is not a matter of orthodoxy. Yet hypothetical necessity appears to have more fundamental problems because it seems to assume that there is nothing about God's nature that makes his forgiveness of our sins dependent upon a representative substitute, sacrifice, and covenant mediator who works on our behalf. This understanding focuses exclusively on God's sovereignty, simply positing that in such freedom God could have chosen other ways of salvation. In contrast, the consequent absolute necessity of Christ arises from the perfections of God's own nature. This view understands that the inherent holiness and justice of God are not limits on his freedom but the nature in which God acts perfectly within his freedom.

While both views of necessity are orthodox, however, which one is more biblical? This is an important question because it recognizes that some orthodox Christologies make better sense of the Bible than others. The best way to answer the question regarding the necessity of Christ is to let Scripture speak for itself, and in the next section we will trace the biblical storyline from the identity of God to the obedience he requires, to the disobedience of humanity and to God's response. Throughout this unfolding story, Scripture creates both the *expectation* and *necessity* that God would bring salvation in the person and work of Christ. This implies that we must affirm no *less* than the hypothetical necessity of Christ, and as we shall see, the Bible's own logic demands that in his unique identity and work, Christ alone is absolutely necessary given God's choice to redeem a sinful humanity. It is not that Christ and his

Crucified: Understanding the Atonement (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 194-219.

work are merely one way to save us among a number of possible options. Who Christ is and what he does is the *only* way God could redeem us.

The covenantal storyline of Scripture reveals the *necessity* of Christ and his work. And the same covenantal development also reveals the *identity* of Christ and the nature of his work. Christ is the one person who (1) fulfills God's own righteousness as a man, (2) reconciles God himself with humanity, and (3) establishes God's own saving rule and reign in this world—all because, and only because, Christ alone is God the Son incarnate.

#### The Covenantal Development of Christ Alone

Nearly fifty years ago, Francis Schaeffer put his finger on a serious problem that remains today. He wrote:

I have come to the point where, when I hear the word "Jesus"—which means so much to me because of the Person of the historic Jesus and His work—I listen carefully because I have with sorrow become more afraid of the word "Jesus" than almost any other word in the modern world. The word is used as a contentless banner . . . there is no rational scriptural content by which to test it. . . .

Increasingly over the past few years the word "Jesus," separated from the content of the Scriptures, has been the enemy of the Jesus of history, the Jesus who died and rose and is coming again and who is the eternal Son of God.<sup>7</sup>

Schaeffer was right. The name "Jesus" has become a mostly meaningless word due to its separation from the content and storyline of Scripture. Jesus is now anything we want him to be, except the Jesus of the Bible. Imposing a foreign worldview on the biblical text, as many do today, necessarily obscures God's authoritative revelation of Jesus's identity. To proceed *intratextually* toward the Bible's Jesus—who is the real Jesus of history—we need to read the Bible on its own terms. We must interpret Jesus within the revealed categories, content, structure, and storyline of Scripture. And this revelational reading starts with the identity of God himself.

Francis A. Schaeffer, Escape from Reason (London: InterVarsity Fellowship, 1968), 78–79.

<sup>8.</sup> This point will be developed in more detail in chapters 11–12.

#### God as the Triune Creator-Covenant Lord

Starting with who God is to identify Christ might seem to be an inefficient or needless investigation when the words and life of Christ are recorded for us in the New Testament. But we must start with the identity of God to make sure that we come to the Bible on its own terms. Scripture begins with God creating the world out of nothing and continues with God relating to his creation according to his character, will, and power. Who God is, then, shapes the entire course of human history and gives unity, meaning, and significance to all of its parts.

Who, then, is the God of Scripture? In a summary way, we can say that he is the triune Creator-Covenant Lord.<sup>9</sup> From the opening verses of Scripture, God is presented as the uncreated, independent, self-existent, self-sufficient, all-powerful Lord who created the universe and governs it by his word (Gen 1-2; Pss 50:12-14; 93:2; Acts 17:24-25). This reality gives rise to the governing category at the core of all Christian theology: the Creator-creature distinction. God alone is God; all else is creation that depends upon God for its existence. But the transcendent lordship of God (Pss 7:17; 9:2; 21:7; 97:9; 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 6:1; Rev 4:3) does not entail the remote and impersonal deity of deism or a God uninvolved in human history. Scripture stresses that God is transcendent and immanent with his creation. As Creator, God is the Covenant Lord who is fully present in this world and intimately involved with his creatures: he freely, sovereignly, and purposefully sustains and governs all things to his desired end (Ps 139:1-10; Acts 17:28; Eph 1:11; 4:6). And yet this immanent lordship does not entail panentheism, which undercuts the Creator-creature distinction of Scripture. Even though God is deeply involved with his world, he is not part of it or developing with it.

As Creator and Covenant Lord, rather, God sovereignly rules over his creation perfectly and personally.<sup>10</sup> He rules with perfect power, knowledge, and righteousness (Pss 9:8; 33:5; 139:1-4, 16; Isa 46:9-11;

For an extended discussion of God as the "Covenant Lord," see John M. Frame, The Doctrine of God (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 1-115. Cf. John S. Feinberg, No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

<sup>10.</sup> For a discussion of God's existence and actions as a personal being, see Feinberg, No One Like Him, 225-31; Frame, Doctrine of God, 602; see also Herman Bavinck, God and Creation, vol. 2 of Reformed Dogmatics, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand

Acts 4:27-28; Rom 11:33-36) as the only being who is truly independent and self-sufficient. God loves, hates, commands, comforts, punishes, rewards, destroys, and strengthens, all according to the personal, covenant relationships that he establishes with his creation. God is never presented as some mere abstract concept or impersonal force. Indeed, as we progress through redemptive history, God discloses himself not merely as uni-personal but as tri-personal, a being-in-relation, a unity of three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit (e.g., Matt 28:18-20; John 1:1-4, 14-18; 5:16-30; 17:1-5; 1 Cor 8:5-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 1:3-14). In short, as the Creator-Covenant triune Lord, God acts in, with, and through his creatures to accomplish all he desires in the way he desires to do it.

Scripture also presents this one Creator-Covenant Lord as the Holy One over all his creation (Gen 2:1–3; Exod 3:2–5; Lev 11:44; Isa 6:1–3; 57:15; cf. Rom 1:18–23). The common understanding for the meaning of holiness is "set apart," but holiness conveys much more than God's distinctness and transcendence. 11 God's holiness is particularly associated with his aseity, sovereignty, and glorious majesty. 12 As the one who is Lord over all, he is exalted, self-sufficient, and self-determined both metaphysically and morally. God is thus categorically different in nature and existence from everything he has made. He cannot be compared with the "gods" of the nations or be judged by human standards. God alone is holy in himself; God alone is God. Furthermore, intimately tied to God's holiness in the metaphysical sense is God's personal-moral purity and perfection. He is "too pure to behold evil" and unable to tolerate wrong (Hab 1:12-13; cf. Isa 1:4-20; 35:8). God must act with holy justice when his people rebel against him; yet he is the God who loves his people with a holy love (Hos 11:9), for he is the God of "covenant faithfulness" (hesed).

Rapids: Baker, 2004), 15-19; cf. D. A. Carson, The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 222-38.

<sup>11.</sup> See Willem VanGemeren, New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:879; see also Feinberg, No One Like Him, 339-45. For a discussion of the belief by past theologians that holiness is the most fundamental characteristic of God, see Richard A. Muller, The Divine Essence and Attributes, vol. 3 of Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 497-503. Even though we must demonstrate care in elevating one perfection of God, there is a sense in which holiness defines the very nature of God.

<sup>12.</sup> See Muller, Divine Essence and Attributes, 497-503.

Often divine holiness and love are set against each other, but Scripture never presents them at odds. We not only see this taught in the OT, but the NT, while maintaining God's complete holiness (see Rev 4:8), also affirms that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). It is important to note, in light of who God is, the biblical tension regarding how God will simultaneously demonstrate his holy justice and covenant love. This tension is only truly resolved in the person and work of Christ, who alone became our propitiatory sacrifice and reconciled divine justice and grace in his cross (Rom 3:21–26). 13

This brief description of God's identity is the first crucial piece of the puzzle that grounds Christ's identity and provides the warrant for *Christ alone*. God's identity as the holy triune Creator-Covenant Lord gives a particular theistic shape to Scripture's interpretive framework.<sup>14</sup> And so this interpretive framework gives a particular theistic shape to the identity of Christ. To help make this point, we should consider three specific examples.

First, the *triunity of God* shapes the identity of Christ. As we will see in the next chapter, Jesus views himself as the eternal Son who even after adding to himself a human nature continues to relate to the Father and Spirit (John 1:1, 14). But it is precisely his identity *as the eternal Son* that gives the Jesus of history his exclusive identity. In fact, it is because he is the divine Son that his life and death has universal significance for all of humanity and the rest of creation. Moreover, Jesus's work cannot be understood apart from Trinitarian relations. It is the Son and not the Father or the Spirit who becomes flesh. The Father sends the Son, the Spirit attends his union with human nature, and the Son bears our sin and the Father's wrath as a man in the power of the Spirit. And yet, as God the Son, Jesus Christ lived and died in unbroken unity with the Father and Spirit because they share the same identical divine nature. Christ is not some third party acting independently of the other two divine persons. At the cross, then, we do not see three parties but only

<sup>13.</sup> On this point, see D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

<sup>14.</sup> All other "theistic" frameworks (deism, panentheism, etc.) are incompatible with the unique biblical-theological framework of Scripture established by its specific metaphysical-moral identification of God. And so only the Bible's particular theistic framework can provide the correct identification of Christ.

two: the triune God and humanity. The cross is a demonstration of the Father's love (John 3:16) by the gift of his Son. 15

Second, the covenantal character of the triune God shapes the identity of Christ. Here we are not first thinking about the biblical covenants unfolded in history, but what Reformed theologians have called the "covenant of redemption." <sup>16</sup> Scripture teaches that God had a plan of salvation before the foundation of the world (e.g., Ps 139:16; Isa 22:11; Eph 1:4; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:20). In that plan, the divine Son, in relation to the Father and Spirit, is appointed as the mediator of his people. And the Son gladly and voluntarily accepts this appointment with its covenant stipulations and promises, which are then worked out in his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. This eternal plan establishes Christ as mediator, defines the nature of his mediation, and assigns specific roles to each person of the Godhead. None of the triune persons are pitted against each other in the plan of redemption. All three persons equally share the same nature and act inseparably according to their mode of subsistence—as Father, as Son, and as Spirit. Finally, the covenant of redemption provides for our covenantal union with Christ as our mediator and representative substitute. The work of Christ as God the Son incarnate, then, is the specific covenantal work designed by the Father, Son, and Spirit to accomplish our eternal redemption.

Third, the *lordship* of the triune covenant God shapes the identity of Christ. As noted, Scripture begins with the declaration that God is the Creator and sovereign King of the universe. He alone is the Lord who is uncreated and self-sufficient and thus in need of nothing outside himself (Pss 50:12–14; 93:2; Acts 17:24–25). Throughout history, theologians have captured the majestic sense of God's self-sufficiency and independence with *aseity*, literally, "life from himself." But, as John Frame reminds us, we must not think of aseity merely in terms of God's self-existence. Aseity is more than a metaphysical attribute; it also applies to epistemological and ethical categories. As Frame notes, "God is not

<sup>15.</sup> On this point, see Macleod, Christ Crucified, 90–100; John R. W. Stott, The Cross of Christ, 20th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 133–62.

<sup>16.</sup> See Macleod, Christ Crucified, 90–100; cf. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds., From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 201–23, 401–35.



#### ZONDERVAN

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Requests for information should be addressed to: Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-51574-6

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Cover design: Christopher Tobias/Outerwear for Books Interior design: Denise Froehlich

Printed in the United States of America

Steve Wellum is my favorite living theologian because he masterfully integrates exegesis, biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology culminating in doxology. He does it again in this book on *solus Christus*.

ANDY NASELLI, assistant professor of New Testament and theology at Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis; elder of Bethlehem Baptist Church

"Christ alone" is the glue and centerpiece of the five great *solas* of the Reformation according to this magnificent work by Steve Wellum. We see the centrality of Christ in both his person and his work, for the work of Christ is effective because of who he is. Wellum makes his case from both biblical and systematic theology, and he shows he is well versed in philosophy as well. I believe this book is going to be read and quoted for many years to come.

THOMAS R. SCHREINER, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, Stephen Wellum reminds us that "Christ alone" is not only the center of the five Reformation *solas*, but that it stands as the central doctrine of systematic theology. Without it we cannot fully understand the doctrines of the Trinity, humanity, or salvation. "Christ alone," argues Wellum, "must connect all the doctrines of our theology because Christ alone stands as the cornerstone of all the purposes and plans of God himself." Consequently, if we get "Christ alone" wrong, Wellum reminds us, "all other doctrines will likely suffer." So take up this book, read it, and think on the person and work of Christ in order that you may know, worship, and proclaim the same Christ as the Reformers, who is none other than the Christ of Scripture.

JUAN R. SANCHEZ, senior pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas





THE DOCTRINE
OF JUSTIFICATION

What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters

# THOMAS SCHREINER

MATTHEW BARRETT, SERIES EDITOR

FOREWORD BY JOHN PIPER

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## **Foreword**

Knowing from James 2:26 that there is such a thing as *dead* faith; and from James 2:19 that there is such a thing as *demonic* faith; and from 1 Corinthians 15:2 that it is possible to believe *in vain*; and from Luke 8:13 that one can "believe for a while, and in time of testing *fall away*"; and knowing that it is through faith that we are *born again* (1 John 5:1) and have *eternal life* (John 3:16, 36), therefore, surely we must conclude that the nature of faith, and its relationship to salvation, is of *infinite* importance.

I use the word *infinite* carefully. I mean that, if we don't have such faith, the consequences have infinite significance. *Eternal* life is an infinite thing. And thus the loss of it is an infinite thing. Therefore, any human concern that has only to do with this world, no matter how global, no matter how painful, no matter how enduring—if it has only to do with this world—compares to the importance of saving faith as a thimble to the ocean.

Which means, this book is dealing with treasures of immeasurable importance. Infinity cannot be measured. And infinite things are at stake. As Tom Schreiner says, the book "tackles one of the fundamental questions of our human condition: how can a person be right with God?"

The stunning Christian answer is: *sola fide* — faith alone. But be sure you hear this carefully and precisely: He says *right with God* by faith alone, not *attain heaven* by faith alone. There are other conditions for attaining heaven, but no others for entering a right relationship to God. In fact, one must already be in a right relationship with God by faith alone in order to meet the other conditions.

"We are justified by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone." Faith that is alone is not faith in union with Christ. Union with Christ makes his perfection and power ours through faith. And in union with Christ, faith is living and active with Christ's power.

Such faith always "works by love" and produces the "obedience of faith." And that obedience—imperfect as it is till the day we die—is not the "basis of justification, but ... a necessary evidence and fruit of justification." In this sense, love and obedience—inherent righteousness—is "required of believers, but not for justification"—that is, required for heaven, not for entering a right-standing with God.

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Everything in this book is measured by the Scriptures. "We should hold to the tradition of *sola fide* because it accords with the Word of God." Therefore, thematically and structurally, the center of the book is biblical exegesis. "In this book I attempt to tour the *historical* teaching of the church, explain the *scriptural* teaching on justification, and provide some sense of *contemporary* relevance" (emphasis added).

But even in the historical and contemporary sections, Scripture remains the lodestar, guiding the ship of Schreiner's analysis. Thus the book is overwhelmingly constructive rather than merely polemical—and always careful, for when handling the most volatile issues, one must handle with care.

Schreiner is unusually careful in handling viewpoints that are different from his own. I have never read another author who states his challenger's viewpoint so fully and persuasively, that it seems so compelling, and then turns around and demolishes it one piece at a time with careful biblical observation and argumentation. It is a trait that awakens trust.

Schreiner does not play God. He does not render judgments about men's souls, only their doctrines. He follows John Owen in the gracious position that "men may be really saved by that grace which doctrinally they do deny; and they may be justified by the imputation of that righteousness, which, in opinion, they deny to be imputed."

His aim is not to defeat others or merely win arguments; his aim is the glory of God and the everlasting joy of people. "Sola fide gives all the glory to God, so that no one will boast in human beings (1 Cor. 1:31)." This is true not only because Christ is the sole ground of our right standing with God, but also because faith itself is a gift: "No one can boast about faith, for faith itself is a gift of God." Moreover, faith, by its very nature, "glorifies and honors God, for it confesses that God can do what he has promised."

And this faith is no mere mental assent, but a heartfelt embrace of Jesus Christ as its all-satisfying treasure. "Justification is by faith alone, for faith finds its *joy* in Christ alone, seeing him as the pearl of great price, the one who is more *desirable* than anything or anyone else" (emphasis added).

Thus Schreiner closes his book with a joyful testimony—and I rejoice to join him in it: "My confidence on the last day ... will not rest on my transformation. I have too far to go to put any confidence in what I have accomplished. Instead, I rest on Jesus Christ. He is my righteousness. He is the guarantor of my salvation. I am justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone."

John Piper
Founder and Teacher, desiringGod.org
Chancellor, Bethlehem College & Seminary

## Introduction

"But when we rise to the heavenly tribunal and place before our eyes that supreme Judge ... then in an instant the vain confidence of men perishes and falls and conscience is compelled ... to confess that it has nothing upon which it can rely before God."

— Francis Turretin

One of the five rallying cries of the Reformation was the statement that we are saved by faith alone—sola fide! These words declared that salvation does not come from looking at our own works of righteousness, but from looking outside ourselves to another, to the person and work of Jesus Christ. This statement grew out of a desire to return to the biblical text and to the teachings of the early church fathers, a cry to reform the church and return it to biblical orthodoxy.

Centuries have passed since the Reformation, and we may wonder: Does *sola fide* still matter today? Is the notion of justification by faith alone just a relic of days gone by, reflecting a nostalgia for a previous time? As will be evident throughout this book, I believe that the Reformation cry of *sola fide* should continue to be taught and treasured today because it summarizes biblical teaching, and God's Word never loses its transforming power. The Word of God speaks in every era and in every place. While some may hold on to *sola fide* to uphold tradition, I believe we should hold on to the tradition of *sola fide* because it accords with the Word of God. Justification by faith alone isn't the product of rigid and brittle orthodoxy. It speaks to the minds and hearts of people all throughout history because it tackles one of the fundamental questions of our human condition: How can a person be right with God?

The words of Francis Turretin (1623–1687) testify to the pastoral relevance of this truth that justification is by *faith alone*. He says we truly understand "the controversy" on justification when we consider our own standing, as individuals, before a holy and righteous God:

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But when we rise to the heavenly tribunal and place before our eyes that supreme Judge ... by whose brightness the stars are darkened, at whose strength the mountains melt; by whose anger the earth is shaken; whose justice not even the angels are equal to bear; who does not make the guilty innocent; whose vengeance when once kindled penetrates even the lowest depths of hell ... then in an instant the vain confidence of men perishes and falls and conscience is compelled ... to confess that it has nothing upon which it can rely before God. And so it cries out with David, "Lord, if thou marked iniquity, who can stand?" ... When the mind is thoroughly terrified with the consciousness of sin and a sense of God's wrath, what is that thing on account of which he may be acquitted before God and be reckoned a righteous person? ... Is it righteousness inhering in us and inchoate holiness or the righteousness and obedience of Christ alone imputed to us?<sup>1</sup>

I will defend in due course the notion that *sola fide* is biblical, but we must never forget why its biblical truth matters to us today. While some may wish to talk about theology for the sake of theological disputation, the central issue, as Turretin points out, is personal. We are talking about standing before God on the last day, on the day of judgment, and *sola fide* answers that question: How will we stand before the Holy One of Israel?

Still, one might agree that how we stand at the final judgment is a crucial question and think at the same time that justification by faith alone should be abandoned. After all, sola fide is easily misunderstood, and because of this they believe that the slogan should be jettisoned. Why appeal to a slogan that needs to be qualified and explained carefully to avoid abuse? This objection, however, applies to every theological truth. We don't surrender the term Trinity, even though it is frequently misunderstood. Instead, what we mean by the word Trinity must be carefully explained and qualified. Theologians, scholars, and pastors must carefully unpack what that term means and what it doesn't mean, so that those who listen to them don't think Christians are tritheists. Yet despite these challenges, we don't abandon the word just because it is easily misinterpreted. Christians throughout history have believed that certain words and phrases are helpful in summarizing and enshrining crucial theological truths. We should not surrender a formula even though it is sometimes misunderstood or wrongly explicated, for the slogan expresses a vital theological truth, one that is worth cherishing and guarding.

<sup>1.</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (trans. George Musgrave Giger; ed. James T. Dennison Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 639–40.

Sometimes Reformed Christians are accused of focusing too much energy on guarding and protecting doctrines and traditions like justification by faith alone. Perhaps, at times, we are guilty of overemphasizing doctrinal fidelity to the neglect of cherishing the truth we confess. Yet guarding the faith is certainly a noble and biblical endeavor. Jude calls us to such in no uncertain terms (Jude 3), and both Galatians and 2 Timothy emphasize that we must guard the gospel and uphold it even when others deny it. Still, we must beware that our efforts at guarding the gospel do not become more important to us than cherishing the life-giving freedom and joy the gospel provides to us. We guard the truth because we cherish it, and we cherish the truth because it is our life. When we are alone and quiet before God, we remember our many sins and our great unworthiness. In such moments we see and sense the glory and beauty of sola fide; we confess "nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." We realize that we can enter boldly into God's presence only because of the grace of God, through faith in the righteousness of Christ alone.

Indeed, *sola fide* is important because it reminds us of the grace of the gospel, testifying that ultimately our salvation, our standing and acceptance before God, is entirely of the Lord. The works of human beings cannot accomplish salvation. Thus, *sola fide* gives all the glory to God, so that no one will boast in human beings (1 Cor 1:31). *Sola fide* reminds us that everything we have is a gift, that every benefit we enjoy is granted to us by God (4:7). The five *solas* of the Reformation are closely tied together, but when it comes to *sola fide* there is an especially close link with *sola gratia* and *solus Christus*. Faith looks to another for salvation, so that salvation is by grace alone and in Christ alone. It is my hope that this book will both guard and cherish the gospel so that we look to Christ as our only hope and give thanks daily for the grace that is our only source of strength.

A final word about the use of slogans and doctrines. Anthony Lane rightly says that doctrines are maps and models, not mathematical formulas.<sup>2</sup> We must avoid, then, relying on simplistic appeals to *sola fide*, or condemning without conversation or understanding those who reject the term. Instead, we must ask what those who reject *sola fide* intend when they question its adequacy. Perhaps those who reject it and those who affirm it are speaking past each other. The fears of those who reject *sola fide* may constitute legitimate objections to misunderstandings of the phrase. To be clear, I am not saying that all disagreements are merely misunderstandings.

<sup>2.</sup> Anthony N. S. Lane, Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 128-32.

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What I am saying is that we should be open to dialogue so that we don't too quickly assume that we disagree.

How important is "faith alone"—the doctrine of justification? I am not arguing that *sola fide* is the gospel, though I believe it is one element or entailment of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> Those who reject the motto aren't necessarily proclaiming a different gospel. It is possible, as I said above, that they are responding to a misunderstanding of the phrase or they have heard an inadequate presentation of what faith alone means, and they rightly disagree with the explanation they have heard. Slogans are helpful, for they summarize briefly our theology, but slogans can also be dangerous, for we may be in a conversation or a debate where we are unknowingly operating with different definitions and concepts. Before we indict someone else, we must be sure that we have heard what they are truly saying.

In this book I attempt to tour the historical teaching of the church, explain the scriptural teaching on justification, and provide some sense of contemporary relevance. At the outset, I should state that this book is not a technical investigation. It is truly a tour, visiting several destinations during the journey and meeting many interesting figures from the past and from today. Still, it is not intended to cover everything that has been or can be said on the topic of justification. Many significant figures in the discussion will be briefly summarized, and others will be passed over. Key periods and figures throughout history are touched upon so that readers gain a larger perspective.

As evangelicals we believe in *sola scriptura*, that the Bible alone is authoritative as God's Word, but it would be foolish to ignore the careful reflections of those who preceded us. It has often been pointed out that *sola scriptura* doesn't mean *nuda scriptura* (bare scripture).<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, my hope is that readers will be encouraged as a result of reflecting on justification by faith alone to stand in faith and to rejoice in faith and as a result give great glory to God.

<sup>3.</sup> For the nature of the gospel, see especially D. A. Carson, "What Is the Gospel?—Revisited," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (eds. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 147–70.

<sup>4.</sup> See the forthcoming work by Matthew Barrett, God's Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016) in this series.

#### PART 1

# A Historical Tour of Sola Fide

#### CHAPTER 1

# Sola Fide in the Early Church

"O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!"

— The Epistle to Diognetus 9.5

We begin our historical tour of the doctrine of justification by looking at the apostolic fathers and the patristic era. In doing so, we must acknowledge that our point of view affects how we read. At the outset we should say that the writings of the earliest Christians should be read with gratefulness and appreciation. When we read them, we recognize and affirm that they confessed the same faith we cherish. We resonate with their belief that Jesus is the Christ and that he fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, for they confessed that Christ is the center of their faith. Evangelical Protestants recognize that God guided the early church as it wrestled with the christological dimensions of the faith revealed to them. Protestants influenced by Reformation traditions affirm that the Nicean and Chalcedonian creeds capture the message of the NT. Nor do we limit our appreciation to christological matters, for we rejoice in their affirmation of the created world, their rejection of Gnosticism, and their concern for ethics proclaimed by Jesus Christ and the apostles.

The oft-repeated saying that we stand on the shoulders of those who precede us applies to the earliest theologians in the history of the church and indeed to all the saints and scholars before us. Protestants who ignore or despise the contributions of the earliest era of the church show their folly and arrogance, for we stand in debt to the church throughout the ages. By affirming *sola fide*, we are not saying that we believe the true church only arose in the sixteenth century, nor are we saying that the church was deeply flawed until the time of the Reformation. On the contrary, we stand in the deepest appreciation of believers who followed the

Lord before us, gratefully acknowledging their faith, wisdom, courage, and devotion. Luther himself acknowledged that there was much good in the church in the 1,500 years preceding him. An observation like this doesn't mean that there weren't weaknesses in the church, nor should we assume that the church and its doctrines have always been biblical and healthy. The Reformation happened for a reason! Still, the danger for many Protestants is to assume that the church had little to no understanding of the Pauline gospel for its first 1,500 years. Such a judgment is a gross exaggeration.

This leads us to the question we first wish to consider: Is *sola fide* taught in the earliest period of church history? We know that the formula itself—"faith alone"—was confessionally adopted during the Reformation after the church had existed for nearly 1,500 years. This leads us to wonder: If the earliest Christians didn't espouse faith alone, should we do so today? Today, many evangelicals are returning to and recovering the voice of the early church fathers.<sup>2</sup> We recognize our debt to the early fathers, and there is now a fresh explosion of interest in their exegesis and theology.<sup>3</sup> We now recognize that the early fathers were careful interpreters of Scripture, and hence our interest in whether they confessed that salvation is by faith alone is piqued. Did Protestants during the time of the Reformation and subsequently perhaps overreact to Roman Catholics? Could there be a more balanced and biblical stance found in the earliest fathers, in those who lived and wrote before the controversies of the 1500s began?

I haven't said anything yet about the soteriology of the earliest Christians, for there is significant controversy in scholarship over whether they were, in fact, faithful to Paul's theology of grace. I can scarcely resolve the matter here, given the extensive debate on the topic. Still, I hope to provide a perspective for our study, and it will become apparent where I lean in the dispute over whether the earliest fathers were faithful to Paul. Some have argued, perhaps most famously Thomas Torrance, that those in the patristic era misunderstood the Pauline gospel and actually contradicted it.<sup>4</sup> Others claim that Torrance's conclusion isn't warranted, that a

<sup>1.</sup> Martin Luther, Church and Ministry II, in vol. 40 of Luther's Works (ed. Conrad Bergendorff; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 231.

<sup>2.</sup> This is evidenced by the movement known as the Theological Interpretation of Scripture.

<sup>3.</sup> The interest is witnessed in the multivolume Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture and Ancient Christian Texts, both published by InterVarsity Press.

<sup>4.</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). For a survey of those who think the earliest fathers misconstrued Paul and did not understand justification, see Thomas C. Oden, *The Justification Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 19–23. See also Louis Berkhof, who says that many of the earliest fathers did not understand justification by faith (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938], 511).

sympathetic examination of the theology of the earliest era shows that they affirmed Paul's gospel.<sup>5</sup> I incline more to the latter viewpoint, but before making that case, I should say another word about the matter of doctrinal clarity and precision.

To put it simply, we cannot expect the earliest Christians to have the same clarity on the issue of *sola fide* as the Reformers.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis we find among them on topics like good works and merit lacks the clarity of the later discussions, but a sympathetic reading doesn't posit a contradiction between them and the Reformers. True faith results in good works, and the term "merit" in the early fathers may designate the reward given instead of being interpreted to say that one earns salvation.<sup>7</sup> We must remember that the early believers were rightly concerned about antinomianism,<sup>8</sup> a misreading of Paul's theology of grace that supported a sinful lifestyle. The earliest fathers rightly opposed what Dietrich Bonhoeffer would later call "cheap grace," an abuse of the freedom of the gospel leading one to excuse sinful behavior.

The Reformers, unlike the church fathers, had the benefit of 1,500 years of Christian reflection in assessing justification and stood in debt to those who preceded them, especially to Augustine. The earliest church didn't encounter significant theological controversy over soteriology and the role of faith and works. They gladly affirmed that salvation was of the Lord. They also, in line with the Pauline witness, confessed that salvation was by faith instead of by works. At the same time they concluded that good works were necessary for final salvation. These affirmations need not be seen as contradictory. They accord with what the NT itself teaches,

He says that there is "an anti-Pauline strain of legalism" in the apostolic fathers (idem, *The History of Christian Doctrines* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1937], 40–41). Later he says that both Irenaeus and Tertullian did not truly understand justification and were guilty of moralism (67–68). And the Alexandrian fathers "certainly did not have the Pauline conception of faith and justification" (74). Space is lacking to tackle all the fathers here, but for a different understanding of Irenaeus, see Mark W. Elliott, "The Triumph of Paulinism by the Mid-Third Century," in *Paul and the Second Century* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson; LNTS 412 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 248.

<sup>5.</sup> E.g., Eric Osborne, "Origen and Justification," *ABR* 24 (1976): 18–29; D. E. H. Williams, "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," *JEH* 57 (2006): 649–67 (though I do not concur with Williams's judgment that the view of the early fathers is a corrective to Reformation perspectives).

<sup>6.</sup> Nevertheless, Needham points out that the notion of faith, and even faith alone, was present in some of the early fathers, especially Chrysostom (Nick Needham, "Justification in the Early Church Fathers," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* [ed. Bruce L. McCormack; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 38–42).

<sup>7.</sup> For this sympathetic reading, see ibid., 42-53.

<sup>8.</sup> So Robert B. Eno, "Some Patristic Views on the Relationship of Faith and Works in Justification," in *Recherches augustiniennes* 19 (1984): 4.

and thus they represent a faithful appropriation of the NT witness, even if some of the terms and expressions of the early fathers lacked the clarity and precision of later formulations. A faithful reception of the NT message shouldn't be equated with a full understanding of soteriology or with the precision that we find with the Reformers and their followers. But the vagueness of the early fathers isn't surprising, for controversy (as is evident with the early debates on the Trinity and Christology) is the furnace in which clearer theology is forged.

What we do not find in the patristic era, at least until Augustine, is a full discussion of the relationship between faith and works. That matter came to the forefront in Augustine's dispute with Pelagius. Before that time the church fathers were content with simply saying what we find in the NT: salvation is by faith and due to the grace of God, and those who experience God's grace should live a new life, for those who are not transformed will not receive an eternal reward. In that respect, the fathers faithfully captured the message of the NT. But we should not expect those in the patristic era to speak directly to issues that arose later in church history.

Some, lamenting the divisions between Roman Catholics and Protestants in the last five hundred years, may pine for the unity on soteriology we find in the early church and might wish that we could go back to that period. Such feelings represent nostalgia, a nostalgia that doesn't accord with historical realities. The truth is that every period of church history has been marked by doctrinal strife and dispute. Indeed, once the matter of faith and works came to the table in the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius, the matter was sharply controverted. Pastors were alerted in a fresh way to the issues at stake.

It is also nostalgic and sentimental to wish that we could discuss the matter of *sola fide* apart from the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, not to mention the four hundred plus years since. The controversy during the Reformation sharpened the debate and posed the issues with a clarity we don't find in the ancient church. Again, to say this is no criticism of the early fathers. We should not expect them to weigh in on issues that weren't debated in their time. We must be careful of an anachronistic criticism that judges theologians based on subsequent history. Nor can we go back to an earlier era to find the doctrinal purity and unity we long for. Instead, we must assess the question of justification in light of the entirety of church history and of the intensive debates and discussions that have arisen. Some may be satisfied with being Augustinian, but the discussion has moved past

Augustine. Such a statement doesn't mean that we ignore Augustine, for his contribution was vital and must be integrated into current discussions. Still, he did not give the final and decisive answer in the discussion, and the contribution of the Reformers and contemporary biblical scholarship must also be included in assessing the role of *sola fide* today.

Indeed, we should be grateful for the last five hundred years, for the debates and divisions and discussions have forced us to read the biblical text intensely and carefully. They prompt us to be like the Bereans, who examined the Scriptures to discern what they actually teach (Acts 17:11). Perhaps some theological formulations are more precise than Scripture warrants. Nevertheless, as the church has learned in christological controversies, it may be that the intense study on justification has led us to a more nuanced view, a view that does justice to the entirety of the scriptural witness. One reason we will engage in a tour of church history, despite the dangers of being selective and brief, is that it provides a taste of the depth and breadth of the work of those who have gone before us.

To sum up, as we consider the contributions of the apostolic fathers and the patristic era, we must not expect too much from them, nor too little. We must not expect them to be conversant with the debates of the Reformation, for that would be anachronistic. At the same time, we can be guilty of expecting too little as well, for if they are faithful to the apostolic witness, we will detect the gospel in what they have written.

#### **Defining Key Terms**

For those who may be new to these discussions or who are unfamiliar with the historic or contemporary debates on the subject of justification, it is important to gain familiarity with some of the key terms used. So, before we dive into the historical evidence for *sola fide*, let's consider some definitions.

Though I've used "justification" several times already and most readers will be familiar with what the term means, we can define it as being

<sup>9.</sup> Michael W. Holmes argues that Polycarp believed in both grace and human achievement and thus was synergistic in contrast to Paul ("Paul and Polycarp," in *Paul and the Second Century* [eds. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson; LNTS 412; New York: T&T Clark, 2011], 66–69). For an even stronger indictment, see Torrance, *Doctrine of Grace in Apostolic Fathers*, 93–96. But in defense of the notion that Polycarp was closer to Paul than many have claimed, see Joel Willitts, "Paul and Jewish Christians in the Second Century," in *Paul and the Second Century*, 154–58.

<sup>10.</sup> Cf. Williams, "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," 664–65. See also the comments by Andreas Lindemann, in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (eds. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 44.

right before God. Justification, then, refers to how we attain righteousness. Forensic understandings of justification see this as being declared righteous before God. By contrast, transformative understandings see it as being made righteous before God. Along with this, it is important that we grasp the distinction between an imputed righteousness and an infused righteousness. Imputed righteousness means that we are declared to be in the right before God on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is given to us when we believe. Infused righteousness means that we are righteous before God because of our righteous behavior, because of the righteousness that transforms and changes us.

Historically, Roman Catholics have defended the notion that the righteousness that saves us on the day of judgment is infused, while Protestants have maintained that the righteousness that delivers us from God's wrath is imputed. I will argue in this book that the Protestant understanding is correct and that the Roman Catholic view deviates from the gospel of Jesus Christ. For those who are new to this discussion, know that we will unpack more of this in the chapters that follow. With these basic definitions in place, we can now turn to the historical evidence for *sola fide* in the early church.

#### Justification by Faith in 1 Clement

In the writings of the earliest Christians we do not find many references to justification, but the evidence we do have supports the notion that most early church fathers understood justification forensically, and thus, as we will see, they stand in contrast to Augustine.<sup>11</sup> We begin with these fascinating words about justification in *1 Clem.* 32:3–4,<sup>12</sup> which most believe was written around AD 96.<sup>13</sup>

All, therefore, were glorified and magnified, not through themselves or their own works or the righteous actions which they did, but through his will. And so we, having been called through his will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our wisdom or understanding or piety or works, which we have done in holiness of heart, but through faith, by which the almighty God has justified all

<sup>11.</sup> See Needham, "Justification in the Early Church Fathers," 27-37. Clement of Alexandria is the other significant exception and seems to have understood the word to mean "make righteous."

<sup>12.</sup> All quotes from the apostolic fathers are from Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

<sup>13.</sup> Lindemann dates it in the late 90s AD (see "Paul's Influence on 'Clement' and Ignatius," in *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* [eds. Andrew F. Gregory and Christopher M. Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 9).

who have existed from the beginning, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. 14

Clement clearly says that our works or holiness do not justify us. As Lindemann observes, Clement "shows quite clearly that he is not a teacher of 'justification by works.' "15 He often emphasizes God's gracious work in believers. 16 Instead, justification is God's work and is granted to those who exercise faith. Such a notion accords with Clement's teaching on election (*1 Clem.* 32:3; 59:2), which features God's grace in salvation. 17 In Clement's emphasis on justification by faith (31:1–2), we have an early example of what would later be known as *sola fide.* 18 At the same time, Clement spends most of the letter exhorting his readers to live a virtuous life. Such an emphasis, however, does not mean that he denies what he wrote about justification. 19 We must consider the occasion and circumstances that called forth the document. 20 For Clement good works flow from faith (30:3) and are not the ground of justification. As Arnold says, good works in Clement "are the appropriate response to the work of salvation, not the foundation of justification." 21

Clement doesn't tie justification to the person and work of Christ to the same degree Paul does. Even though we don't have the same kind of clarity that we find in Paul, the importance of Christ's blood is noted (7:4), and hence there are reasons to think that justification is due to what Christ has accomplished.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Justification in Ignatius**

Another early witness to justification by faith is Ignatius.<sup>23</sup> Ignatius emphasizes that believers live according to grace and center on Jesus

<sup>14.</sup> In support of the notion that 1 Clement doesn't deny grace, see Heikki Räisänen, "'Righteousness by Works': An Early Catholic Doctrine? Thoughts on 1 Clement," in *Jesus, Paul and Torah: Collected Essays* (trans. David E. Orton; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 202–24.

<sup>15.</sup> Andreas Lindemann, "Paul in the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (ed. William S. Babcock; Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 33.

<sup>16.</sup> Rightly Räisänen, "Righteousness by Works," 206–7.

<sup>17.</sup> Cf. Brian John Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 43–44.

<sup>18.</sup> So ibid., 45-46.

<sup>19.</sup> For the contrary idea that Clement is legalistic, see Torrance, *Doctrine of Grace in Apostolic Fathers*, 49-50, 54.

<sup>20.</sup> So Lindemann, "Paul in the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers," 35; Räisänen, "Righteousness by Works," 205–6; Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 41–42.

<sup>21.</sup> Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 52.

<sup>22.</sup> Ibid., 53-54; Räisänen, "Righteousness by Works," 209.

<sup>23.</sup> My discussion of Ignatius is indebted to Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 56-103, whom I largely follow here.

Christ (*Magn*. 8:1; *Phld*. 9:2). Even though he doesn't highlight the term justification, he features the content of the gospel and Jesus' death and resurrection (*Phld*. 9:2).<sup>24</sup> Those who center on Jesus Christ don't fall prey to Judaism (*Magn*. 10:3; *Phld*. 6:1). Instead, Ignatius calls on his readers to exercise faith and love (*Eph*. 1:14; *Magn*. 1). Justification for Ignatius centers on Jesus Christ (*Phld*. 8:2), and the atonement that comes through his blood (*Smyrn*. 6:1), so that Christ is understood as a substitute (*Rom*. 6:1; *Smyrn*. 6:2; *Trall*. 2:1; 9:2). Indeed, it seems that justification is apart from works of law since he rejects circumcision for salvation.<sup>25</sup> Ignatius recognizes his own imperfection and his need for mercy, finding rest in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that the gospel is his hope (*Phld*. 5:1–2; *Smyrn*. 11:1).<sup>26</sup>

Thomas Torrance thinks that faith and love in Ignatius mean that faith and works justify us.<sup>27</sup> But again we need to remember the situation and occasion that called forth the Ignatian letters. In this case, Ignatius was about to suffer martyrdom.<sup>28</sup> Still, he continued to emphasize the grace of God (*Magn.* 8:1; *Smyrn.* 6:2), and love should be construed as the consequence and fruit of faith.<sup>29</sup> Others see the emphasis on martyrdom in Ignatius to be opposed to justification by faith, as if he put his trust in his sacrifice. One could interpret his martrydom in this way, but the necessity of martrydom doesn't necessarily communicate works-righteousness, for the desire to be faithful accords with the Pauline teaching that one must endure to be saved.<sup>30</sup>

#### The Great Exchange in the Epistle to Diognetus

Sometimes scholars will say that the earliest fathers didn't understand substitution or grace, but the famous words of the *Epistle to Diognetus* 9:2–5 (written in the second century AD) show that such statements are off the mark.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24.</sup> Ibid., 80-83.

<sup>25.</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>26.</sup> Ibid., 86-88.

<sup>27.</sup> Torrance, Doctrine of Grace in Apostolic Fathers, 60-61, 66-69.

<sup>28.</sup> For the circumstances that called forth what Ignatius wrote, see Lindemann, "Paul in the Writings of the Apostolic Fathers," 40-41.

<sup>29.</sup> Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 96.

<sup>30.</sup> Ibid., 99-102.

<sup>31.</sup> See Brandon Crowe, "Oh Sweet Exchange!: The Soteriological Significance of Incarnation in the *Epistle to Diognetus*," *ZNW* 102 (2011): 96–109; Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 104–36.

But when our unrighteousness was fulfilled, and it had been made perfectly clear that its wages—punishment and death—were to be expected, then the season arrived during which God had decided to reveal at last his goodness and power (oh, the surpassing kindness and love of God!). He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us; instead he was patient and forbearing; in his mercy he took upon himself our sins; he himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, "the just for the unjust," the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but his righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? O the sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!

Justification by grace and by the substitutionary work of Christ are clearly taught here, putting the burden of proof on those who claim that substitution is a modern or Western notion. This text clearly teaches that the only hope of forgiveness and justification is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and thus there are reasons to conclude that he endorsed what we refer to as *sola fide*. Brandon Crowe observes that chapter 9 of the *Epistle to Diognetus* contrasts the righteousness of God with the unrighteousness of humanity, showing "the impossibility of humanity to enter the Kingdom of God based on its own ability. Instead, human beings must rely on the power of God to be made worthy. This is not to say that Diognetus is like Paul in every respect, for there are differences as well, but we do see the elements of Pauline soteriology here.

#### Justification in the Odes of Solomon

Paul's understanding of justification doesn't vanish into the thin air after the first century. We also see a Pauline view of grace and faith in the *Odes of Solomon*.<sup>36</sup> In these writings, the grace of God is underscored by

<sup>32.</sup> Crowe goes beyond this and sees the positive imputation of the righteousness of Christ here, arguing that the author interprets Rom 5:18–19 this way ("Oh Sweet Exchange," 104–9).

<sup>33.</sup> Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 134.

<sup>34.</sup> Crowe, "Oh Sweet Exchange," 101; so also Williams, "Justification by Faith: A Patristic Doctrine," 654.

<sup>35.</sup> See Michael F. Bird, "The Reception of Paul in *The Epistle to Diognetus*," in *Paul and the Second Century* (eds. Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson; LNTS 412; New York: T&T Clark, 2011). 85–88.

<sup>36.</sup> Arnold, "Justification One Hundred Years after Paul," 137–96. Again, I am indebted to Arnold for what follows.

#### To my daughter, Anna. Every day you bring me joy.

#### ZONDERVAN

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Requests for information should be addressed to: Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schreiner, Thomas R.

Faith alone—the doctrine of justification : what the reformers taught and why it matters / Thomas R. Schreiner.

pages cm.-(The five solas series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-310-51578-4 (softcover)

1. Justification (Christian theology) I. Title.

BT764.3.S37 2015

234'.7 – dc23

2014044777

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Cover design: Chris Tobias / Outerwear for Books Interior design: Kait Lamphere

Printed in the United States of America

### Praise for Faith Alone

"Dr. Schreiner has done a magnificent job of expounding the key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation, *sola fide*, which remains as vital for us today as when Martin Luther first proclaimed it. Schreiner's clear explanation of justification by faith alone will do much to strengthen the faith of a new generation and its witness to this timeless truth."

—GERALD BRAY, research professor of divinity, Beeson Divinity School

"The doctrine by which the church stands or falls—that's how Luther described the importance of justification by faith alone. Without the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith alone, we are truly without hope before a holy God. Thomas Schreiner, one of the most clear-headed and biblically faithful New Testament scholars of our generation, has produced a compelling and careful defense of the doctrine of justification that readers will find both exegetically faithful and theologically enriching. This book will help the church in this generation to stand on solid ground."

—R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"As new ideas about justification have proliferated in recent years, the need for a clear analysis of these ideas and a better understanding of the traditional Reformation view has grown. Tom Schreiner's *Faith Alone* accomplishes both tasks admirably. Schreiner anchors his exposition of the key biblical themes in the history of the doctrine, and defends the Reformation view in light of the many current challenges. Comprehensive, readable, persuasive."

—Douglas J. Moo, Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College; Chair, Committee on Bible Translation (NIV)





THE MAJESTIC HEART OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE

What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters

# DAVID VANDRUNEN

MATTHEW BARRETT, SERIES EDITOR

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#### CHAPTER 1

# Soli Deo Gloria Among the Reformation Solas

"It is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."

-Martin Luther

"We never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory. . . . The elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else."

—John Calvin

Soli Deo Gloria—Glory to God alone. Most Protestant Christians do not read Latin these days, but many of them need no help translating these three words. What simple slogan stirs the godly heart more warmly and encapsulates more biblical truth than soli Deo gloria? "Glory to God" was the theme of the angelic host that announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds in the field and of the heavenly throng whose songs John recorded in Revelation. What a privilege almost beyond imagination that the allmajestic God calls sinners like us to contemplate his glory and to echo the angels' chorus in our own worship. And what a blessing that he enables us to write and read books on such a grand topic.

The occasion for this book, and the series of which it's a part, is to commemorate and celebrate the Protestant Reformation, whose unofficial 500th birthday draws near as I write. Protestants commonly speak of the "five solas of the Reformation," but we often forget that the Reformers themselves never sat down and adopted these five slogans—sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, and soli Deo gloria—as the official mottos of the Reformation movement. At first, this sounds a little disappointing. We like to think we're adopting the very same set of phrases

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that Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their colleagues bequeathed to their spiritual posterity.

It really shouldn't disappoint us at all. People may have begun speaking of the "five solas of the Reformation" only long after the Reformation itself, but each of these five themes does in fact probe the heart of Reformation faith and life in its own way. The Reformers may not have spoken explicitly of "the five solas," but the magnification of Christ, grace, faith, Scripture, and God's glory—and these alone—suffused their theology and ethics, their worship and piety. Christ alone, and no other redeemer, is the mediator of our salvation. Grace alone, and not any human contribution, saves us. Faith alone, and no other human action, is the instrument by which we're saved. Scripture, and no merely human word, is our ultimate standard of authority. God's glory alone, and that of no creature, is the supreme end of all things. Our study of the five solas involves no rote repetition of slogans but the wonderful embrace of the holy religion taught in the Bible and revitalized in the Reformation.

#### Soli Deo Gloria: The Glue That Holds the Solas Together

Even so, there may seem to be something about soli Deo gloria that works less well than the other four as a motto summarizing Reformation theology. Teachers of Reformation theology, trying to be fair and accurate, often have to remind their students that medieval Christianity and sixteenth century Roman Catholicism did not deny the importance of Scripture, faith, grace, and Christ. Theologians spoke of them often and would have eagerly affirmed that there is no salvation without them. But if we could press the matter further and ask these theologians about the little word alone, we would soon find genuine disagreement. While the Reformers claimed that Scripture alone is the authority for Christian faith and life, Roman Catholics professed reverence for Scripture but insisted that the church's tradition and the Pope in Rome stood alongside Scripture to interpret it infallibly and to augment its teaching. When the Reformers asserted that justification comes by faith alone, Roman Catholics responded that justification does indeed come by faith, but also by works alongside faith. They had similar exchanges about grace and Christ.

Claims about Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone concerned the two chief points of debate between Rome and the Reformation: religious authority and the doctrine of salvation. *Soli Deo gloria* thus appears to be a bit of an outlier. When the Reformers proclaimed

that glory belongs to God alone, did Roman Catholics really respond that glory in fact belongs equally to God and something or someone else? Does the principle of *soli Deo gloria*, magnificent as it is, really have much to do with the Reformation itself?

Indeed it does, even if Rome never directly denounced the idea of glory to God *alone* as it denounced the ideas of Scripture *alone* and faith *alone*. *Soli Deo gloria* can be understood as the glue that holds the other *solas* in place, or the center that draws the other *solas* into a grand, unified whole. Recent writers suggest the same idea when they speak of *soli Deo gloria* as "the logical implication of the other four points" or as the motto that "subsumes all the others."

What justifies such strong claims? Simply put, the fact that salvation is by faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone, without any meritorious contribution on our part, ensures that all glory is God's and not our own. Likewise, the fact that Scripture alone is our final authority, without any ecclesiastical tradition, magisterium, or Pope supplementing or overruling it, protects the glory of God against every human conceit. Rome, of course, would never admit to usurping God's glory. Even meritorious human works, it says, are accomplished by divine grace infused through the sacraments. The church's traditions grow organically from the practice of the apostles, Rome adds, and the Pope is the servant of servants. But the Reformers came to understand how such claims, though perennially attractive, ultimately reveal the deceit of the human heart. How we like to think that there's something for us to add to the satisfaction and obedience of Christ or to the inspired word of the prophets and apostles, and even that God is wonderfully honored by our contribution. But the Reformers perceived that the perfect word and work of Christ—precisely because they are perfect—need nothing to supplement them. Anything that tries to supplement them, in fact, challenges their perfection and thus dishonors God's word and work in Christ. If the Roman Catholic doctrine of authority and doctrine of salvation are true, all glory thus does not belong to God alone. And God, Scripture tells us, will share his glory with no other (Isa 42:8).

We might think of it in another way. By holding forth *soli Deo gloria* as the lifeblood of the *solas*, we remind ourselves that the biblical religion recaptured by the Reformation is not ultimately about ourselves, but about

<sup>1.</sup> See respectively John D. Hannah, How Do We Glorify God? (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 9; R. C. Sproul Jr., "Soli Deo Gloria," in After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology: Essays in Honor of R. C. Sproul, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 191.

God. Our focus so easily becomes self-centered, even when we ask the same important questions that occupied the Reformers: Where can I find God's authoritative revelation? How can I escape the wrath of God? What must I do to be saved? The other four solas provide necessary and life-changing answers to such questions, but soli Deo gloria puts them in proper perspective: the highest purpose of God's plan of salvation in Christ, made known in Scripture, is not our own beatitude, wonderful as that is. The highest purpose is God's own glory. God glorifies himself through the abundant blessings he bestows upon us.

# A Theology of Glory Vs. a Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther

As we embark on this study, some puzzling questions may arise for readers familiar with Reformation theology. Didn't Martin Luther speak against a "theology of glory"? Can an emphasis upon the glory of God actually detract from a biblical "theology of the cross" rather than illumine it? These are good questions. Luther did, in fact, call for a theology of the cross to replace the theology of glory he thought so prevalent in his own day, but his purpose was not to divert our attention from the glory of God. Rather, it was to explain how God manifests his glory to us and calls us to glorious fellowship with him. This is a great example of Luther's delight in paradox. Anyone who wishes to know the great God of glory must see him through the humility of the cross. Luther's reasoning is worth contemplating, because it exposes an important theme in subsequent chapters of this book: according to Scripture, glory comes through suffering. God is most highly glorified through the suffering of his Son; Christians know God and are glorified with Christ only by taking up their cross and following him.

Luther objected to the so-called theology of glory because he was concerned that Christians were seeking to know God in the wrong way. Many theologians thought they could understand the one true God by the speculative power of their own reason. They figured they could get to God directly and perceive him as he is in himself. Luther countered that we have no hope of knowing God unless he takes the initiative and reveals himself to us, and this strips us of our illusions of control. The theology of glory, therefore, is an exercise of human pretension. Sinful human beings, cloaking their hubris in a seemingly pious religiosity, try to climb to heaven to get a peek at God in his majesty. If we want to know God, Luther came to recognize, we must know him through revelation,

and his clearest revelation is in Scripture. And when we open Scripture and learn that we are lost sinners, and that a God of wrath and judgment stands against us, the theology of glory becomes but a dream extinguished by Scripture's dawn.

In Scripture, however, Luther also discovered the theology of the cross. As long as sinful people strive to come to God by their own resources, the Almighty will keep himself veiled. But when they seek him through the humanly unimaginable way of the cross, God redeems them from sin and provides genuine knowledge of himself. To behold the God of glory, we must behold God beaten, mocked, and crucified. To gain everlasting beatitude, we must utterly humble ourselves and find refuge only in a cursed cross.

It may be helpful to hear this in a few of Luther's own words. Some of his most famous statements about the theology of glory and theology of the cross come from the Heidelberg Disputation, composed in 1518, during his early efforts at reformation. Luther identifies two kinds of theologians. One is the "theologian of the cross": he "who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross" is the one who deserves to be called a theologian. "It is not sufficient for anyone," writes Luther, "and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross." On the other hand, Luther describes the "theologian of glory" in this way: he "who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil." The "theologian of the cross," in contrast, has been "deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's."2

As it turns out, Luther's critique of the theology of glory was hardly opposed to the perspective summarized at the opening of this chapter. I noted that the two overriding concerns of the Reformation had to do with religious authority and the doctrine of salvation. Luther championed the theology of the cross as a result of the same concerns. The theology of the cross was built upon biblical revelation that rejected all speculative human attempts to know God in our own way.<sup>3</sup> The theology of the cross was also

<sup>2.</sup> Luther's Works, vol. 31, Career of the Reformer: I, ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 52–53.

<sup>3.</sup> As Alister McGrath has put it, "We may summarize the leading features of the *theologia crucis* [theology of the cross] as follows: (1) The theology of the cross is a theology of revelation, which stands in sharp contrast to speculation." See *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 149.

a theology of salvation, rejecting all vain endeavors to reconcile ourselves to the creator.<sup>4</sup> It therefore points only to the grace of God in Christ, and summons us to confess our own poverty, to look outside of ourselves, and to cling only to Christ by faith. It hardly turns us away from God's glory altogether. God glorifies himself, and we can live for his glory, but only along a path that unaided human reason could never have discovered and would never have dared imagine. The way to God's glory winds through the lowliness and desolation of Calvary.

#### Divine Glory and Human Glory: John Calvin

The suspected tension between Luther's critique of the theology of glory and the Reformation theme of *soli Deo gloria* turns out to be no problem at all. A different sort of problem is perhaps more serious, since it threatens to challenge the whole thrust of Reformation theology we've considered thus far. The alleged problem is this: the emphasis on God's glory and God's glory *alone* seems to demean human beings. If God's glory implies humanity's debasement, is such a God really worthy of our praise? Furthermore, the problem continues, this depiction of human debasement is hardly consistent with Scripture. Scripture describes human beings as the pinnacle of God's creation, as divine image-bearers with dominion over the world. Even after the fall, God redeems his people so that someday they might be glorified. Surely if glorification awaits us, then glory does not belong to God *alone*!

This, too, is not really a problem, but it does present a challenge. I asked at the outset whether any simple slogan encapsulates as much truth as *soli Deo gloria*. I think the answer is probably no, yet by their very nature slogans simplify matters and fail to express nuance and complexity. If the *soli Deo gloria* theme is as profound as I've suggested, then we must attend to its nuance and complexity in order to do it justice. This alleged tension between the *soli Deo gloria* theme and the gift of human glorification is a great case in point.

Scripture does indeed speak of human experience and the human calling in many exalted ways. God made us in his image—just a little lower than the angels—and gave us dominion over the works of his hands (Gen 1:26–28; Ps. 8:5–8). Even more marvelous, God destined human beings

<sup>4.</sup> Bernhard Lohse comments that "use of the concepts theologia gloriae and theologia crucis... helps to make the question of salvation the theme of his theology." See Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 38. For similar comments, see also McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 151, 174.

to rule the world to come (Heb 2:5–9). He has promised that those who believe in his Son, though guilty sinners, will share in Christ's glory and have glory revealed in them (Rom 8:17–18). At first blush, this does seem to contradict the Reformation slogan we so enthusiastically promote.

Yet we need not be embarrassed by the Bible's description of human exaltation. It is good that we feel the tension and wrestle with it, because we cannot fully understand the glory of God without giving due weight to humanity's glorification in creation and especially in redemption. One way to put it is that the all-wise and loving God is pleased to glorify himself precisely through the glorification of his human creation. Our glory, such as it is, redounds back to God's glory. From a different angle we might also say that precisely through acknowledging and seeking God's glory alone, human beings attain their highest destiny and enjoy their proper dignity. Our words are true and edifying when they conform to Scripture alone. Our works become good and holy when they proceed from justification by grace alone through faith alone. We are renewed in the image of God when we rest on Christ alone. So are human beings demeaned by the confession of glory to God alone? Unexpectedly, no. As the opening of both the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms communicates, God simultaneously makes us instruments for glorifying him and causes us to enjoy him as we ascribe to him all glory: the "chief end of man" is "to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." In God's glory is our dignity. In God's glory is our delight. Our glorification lies in ascribing all glory in heaven and earth to him.

The Reformers understood this. John Calvin provides a good example. In his zeal to protect the supreme glory of God, Calvin recognized that God manifests his glory in large part through the beauty of his handiwork. Calvin stood in awe of creation as a "beautiful theatre," indeed, a "theatre of the divine glory." "In every part of the world," he writes, "some lineaments of divine glory are beheld." Appealing to biblical texts that describe God's revelation of his greatness through nature, Calvin observes: "Because the glory of his power and wisdom is more refulgent in the firmament, it is frequently designated as his palace. And, first, where you turn your eyes, there is no portion of the world, however minute, that does not exhibit at

<sup>5.</sup> Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 1.14.20; and Calvin, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 22 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 266 (concerning Hebrews 11:3). For helpful discussions of Calvin's view of the natural order and its revelation of God's glory, see e.g. Susan E. Schreiner, The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin (Durham: Labyrinth, 1991); and Davis A. Young, John Calvin and the Natural World (Lanham, MO: University Press of America, 2007).

<sup>6.</sup> *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

least some sparks of beauty; while it is impossible to contemplate the vast and beautiful fabric as it extends around, without being overwhelmed by the immense weight of glory."7

But Calvin also thought that God's glory shines in a special way in human beings, created in the image of God. Calvin located the image, and hence humanity's chief dignity, especially in the soul, yet he also comments: "There was no part even of the body in which some rays of glory did not shine," and thus "the divine glory is [also] displayed in man's outward appearance."8 Calvin's zeal for the glory of God, therefore, hardly entailed a demeaning view of creation or of humanity in particular. In fact, it was just the opposite. The beauty and dignity we have, thought Calvin, reflect God's glory manifest in us.

If God's glory shines in the original creation, how much more does it radiate in Christ, his work of redemption, and the hope of new creation? "In the person of Christ," Calvin remarks, "the glory of God is visibly manifested to us." The salvation achieved in Christ's incarnation also promotes the divine glory. When contemplating our justification in Christ, for example, Calvin asserts that "two ends must be kept especially in view—namely, that the glory of God be maintained unimpaired, and that our consciences, in the view of his tribunal, be secured in peaceful rest and calm tranquility."<sup>10</sup> We ought to remember, he adds, "that in the whole discussion concerning justification the great thing to be attended to is, that God's glory be maintained entire and unimpaired; since, as the Apostle declares, it was in demonstration of his own righteousness that he shed his favor upon us."

This statement is a wonderful example of how soli Deo gloria is so closely connected with the other Reformation solas. Salvation by Christ alone, through grace alone, by faith alone means that all glory goes to God alone. And far from demeaning us, this marvelous display of divine glory enables us to fulfill our highest calling. Even now, explains Calvin through his own "theology of the cross," we have the privilege of declaring God's glory as we cast aside our own: "We never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory . . . The elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else."11 But even this is nothing compared to the privilege that awaits the saints when Christ

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., 1.5.1.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., 1.5.3.

<sup>9.</sup> Ibid., 3.2.1.

<sup>10.</sup> Ibid., 3.13.1.

<sup>11.</sup> Ibid., 3.13.2.

returns. Commenting on Titus 2:13, Calvin states: "I interpret the glory of God to mean not only that by which he shall be glorious in himself, but also that by which he shall then diffuse himself on all sides, so as to make all his elect partakers of it."12

The cynic's objection that the Reformation theme of soli Deo gloria debases humanity need not worry us. In fact, to find humanity debased, we need look no further than the imaginary universe of those who deny God's glory. If God is not the all-glorious creator and redeemer, then this world is random chaos, life is meaningless, and human destiny is the grave. The biblical and Reformation message of soli Deo gloria, on the other hand, directs our eyes to Christ's second coming, when God will reveal his glory most brilliantly and his people, saved by grace, will themselves be glorified with their Lord. 13 This, too, must be our theme in the chapters ahead.

#### The Glory of God in Contemporary Theology

Even the relatively brief survey in the pages above highlights the importance of the soli Deo gloria theme for the Reformation, a theme originating not with the Reformers but in Scripture itself. In light of its eminent pedigree, it's little wonder that many contemporary writers who embrace the Reformation continue to return to the theme of God's glory to unfold the message of Scripture and to describe the character of the Christian religion. They do so in many different ways, however. Most of their approaches are compatible, and I imagine most of them would appreciate the others' insights. In part, their different approaches stem from the richness of the soli Deo gloria motif in Scripture and the fact that this single jewel can be admired from various angles. While my own treatment of the subject in subsequent chapters comports with some of these approaches better than with others, my point in sampling them is not to critique any in particular but to provide readers with a sense of the contemporary landscape and to help us identify important aspects of the full biblical presentation of soli Deo gloria.

<sup>12.</sup> Calvin's Commentaries, 21: 320 (concerning Titus 2:13). For helpful discussion of God's glory in Christ and redemption through him, see Billy Kristanto, Sola Dei Gloria: The Glory of God in the Thought of John Calvin (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), Part 2.

<sup>13.</sup> Although I discuss only Luther and Calvin, other Protestants Reformers were also devoted to the glory of God as central for Christian faith and life. To give but one example, Heinrich Bullinger, a prominent Reformer in Zurich, wrote: "Whosoever is endued with the Spirit of God, whatsoever he shall either do or say will sayour of the fear of God; finally, he shall say and do all things unto the glory of God: and all these things truly are freely and fully drawn out of the only fountain of the Holy Ghost." See Henry Bullinger, The Decades of Henry Bullinger, The Fourth Decade, ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1851), 320.

One emphasis among some recent writers captures perhaps the most common way of thinking about the soli Deo gloria theme in popular imagination: soli Deo gloria is a call for believers to gear all of their pursuits for the glory of God. This emphasis seems to follow the spirit of the great musician and orthodox Lutheran Johann Sebastian Bach, who appended "SDG" to scores he composed. 14 Terry Johnson, for example, devotes two chapters to soli Deo gloria in a book on the Reformation solas, the first of which focuses upon the reform of worship and church government. Then he treats the theme in terms of being obedient to God in all areas of life and the impact it can have on our surrounding cultures. He urges that soli Deo gloria calls believers today to "carry the Christian world-view into their realms of endeavor . . . "15

John Hannah raises similar ideas. He explains how "glory" expresses God's internal qualities or attributes and how Scripture often describes God's glory as a visible display of his brightness and excellency. 16 But central to Hannah's work—in accord with its title: How Do We Glorify God?—are the moral implications of God's glory. Our postmodern age, he observes, is one of radical self-centeredness and narcissism, but soli Deo gloria is "a call to a radical vision of God-centered living in all of life's many facets. The glory of God alone implies the right purpose for all of life—a God-centered purpose. All who share this radical view of Christianity make the ultimate purpose of life God's glory, not their own self-fulfillment or self-realization."17 At some length, he later explains how God is glorified as we mirror his holiness and how this should transform our perspective on work, politics, and other endeavors of life. 18

Reflecting on the theme of God's glory from a somewhat different angle, John Piper invokes the theology of Jonathan Edwards, and especially his treatise, "The End for Which God Created the World," about which I'll say a little more in the next chapter. Piper explains, "The rejoicing of all peoples in God, and the magnifying of God's glory are one end, not two. . . . The exhibition of God's glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing." This, he says, is what his own life is all about and

<sup>14.</sup> See Calvin R. Stapert, My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of Bach (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 27-28; and Jaroslav Pelikan, Bach Among the Theologians (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 140.

<sup>15.</sup> Terry L. Johnson, The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), 162. The two chapters dealing with soli Deo gloria are 6-7.

<sup>16.</sup> John Hannah, How Do We Glorify God? Basics of the Reformed Faith Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P♥R, 2008), 6-7.

<sup>17.</sup> Ibid., 6-7, 9.

<sup>18.</sup> Ibid., 19-35, 38-40.

what shapes nearly everything he preaches and writes.<sup>19</sup> In this Edwardsian vision, God's grace enables us to grow into an ever-increasing delight in God, and "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."<sup>20</sup> Thus, God zealously desires our joy just as much as he desires his own glory.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, Piper embraces C. S. Lewis's aphorism, "It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can."<sup>22</sup>

Another route by which contemporary writers approach the theme of God's glory is as an organizing theme of biblical theology. I use the term "biblical theology" here in a technical sense. Biblical theology—in distinction from other methods of doing theology, such as systematic theology and historical theology—explores the progress and organic development of theological themes and of the overall message of Scripture as the biblical canon moves from earlier books to later books. We can also think of this as movement within Scripture from less complete revelation of God to more complete, or as the gradual growth in the manifestation of God's truth from seed into full blossom. I raise this subject because several writers have recently identified the glory of God as the central theme of biblical theology, that is, the central theme of this unfolding, ever more profound revelation of God in Scripture.

One of them, James Hamilton, organizes his *Biblical Theology* around the motif of God's glory in his work of salvation and judgment through history. He acknowledges that God's glory "is like a many-faceted gem, which reflects and refracts light in ever-new, ever-unexpected ways as it is admired." But Hamilton attempts to bring these various beams of divine glory together by suggesting that "the glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth." Hamilton recognizes a movement in Scripture from the more limited and local manifestations of God's glory to Old Testament Israel toward the universal and eschatological goal of God's glory filling all the world. <sup>25</sup>

Thomas Schreiner also makes the glory of God a major strand of his

<sup>19.</sup> John Piper, God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 31-32.

<sup>20.</sup> Ibid., 34-35, 47.

<sup>21.</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>22.</sup> Ibid., 46 (italics his).

<sup>23.</sup> James M. Hamilton, God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 59.

<sup>24.</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>25.</sup> Ibid., 106, 116, 268-69, 343, 483.

Biblical Theology, as he did in earlier works on New Testament biblical theology and Paul.<sup>26</sup> Schreiner claims that Scripture uses the word "glory" "broadly to capture the supremacy of God in everything." He believes this has direct implication for our moral lives: "Human beings exist to obey, believe in, and praise God . . . God exercises an absolute claim upon the lives of all."27 A third contemporary biblical theologian, G. K. Beale, also calls readers' attention to the centrality of God's glory at the outset of A New Testament Biblical Theology: "I contend that the goal of the New Testament storyline is God's glory, and that the main stepping-stone to that goal is Christ's establishment of an eschatological new-creational kingdom and its expansion." Beale's primary focus is upon this steppingstone, the new creation, but only because many others have already argued effectively that the glory of God is Scripture's ultimate end.<sup>28</sup>

These contemporary authors testify to the continuing richness and vibrancy of the Reformation theme that glory belongs to God alone. Whether contemplating godly service in the world, Christian spirituality, or the developing revelation of God's salvation in Scripture, these writers find the glory of God a deep reservoir for theological reflection. That will be the case in subsequent chapters of this book as well.

#### All Glory Belongs to God and Not to Ourselves

In this book, we have set out to contemplate the glory of the Lord and the Reformation theme that all glory belongs to God. The Reformers established a trajectory that will surely not lead us astray. Against the perennial temptation to elevate our own words above God's and to pursue everlasting life by our own deeds, the Reformers called the church back to Scripture alone, to faith alone, to grace alone, and to Christ alone, and by so doing they reminded us that all glory belongs to God and not to ourselves. Approaching this God and knowing him truly requires us to humble ourselves and to seek him in the lowliness of the cross. Yet far from debasing us, humbling ourselves by faith in Christ crucified reconciles us to God and enables us to become the sort of creatures God made us to be. God grants us the privilege of reflecting his own glory as we grow in

<sup>26.</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Thomas R. Schreiner, New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Thomas R. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>27.</sup> G. K. Beale, A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 126.

<sup>28.</sup> Ibid., 16.

holiness and ascribe him glory in our worship, and by one day joining him in the glory of the new creation—which Scripture wonderfully calls our *glorification*. God draws supreme glory to himself, in part, by glorifying us. The Reformation theme of *soli Deo gloria* is indeed a beautiful aspect of the good news of the gospel.

Our chief interest in this book is to explore this theme further in Scripture and to consider how we might build on the Reformers' insights and gain a deeper and fuller picture of the glory of God and its implications for Christian faith and life. The contemporary writers discussed above encourage us to think this is still a noble and profitable task. But before moving directly to Scripture, we would do well to reflect also on how Reformed theologians between the time of the Reformation and the early twenty-first century presented this topic. In Chapter 2, therefore, we continue these initial historical reflections by turning to the age of Reformed Orthodoxy (so-called), where we find not a dry and stifling theology, as the name might suggest, but a rich and careful understanding of the glory of God, its revelation in history, and its wonderful benefits for Christ's saints.

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

VanDrunen, David, 1971-

God's glory alone—the majestic heart of Christian faith and life: what the reformers taught...and why it still matters / David VanDrunen.

192 pages cm.-(The five Solas series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-310-51580-7 (softcover)

1. Glory of God-Christianity. 2. Reformed Church-Doctrines. I. Title.

BT180.G6V36 2015

231-dc23

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201501936

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Cover design: Chris Tobias/Outerwear for Books Interior design: Kait Lamphere

Printed in the United States of America

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—SCOTT R. SWAIN, Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

"This book does much more than defend a reformation slogan. VanDrunen's examination of *soli Deo gloria* explores who God is and who God intends us to be. Clearly and occasionally wonderfully written, thorough, wise, and biblically deep, it says so much that Christians in our day should hear that I find myself picturing venues—Sunday School, student discussion groups, class assignments—where I can use it. Read it and grow."

-MARK R. TALBOT, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Wheaton College



THE AUTHORITY
OF SCRIPTURE

What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters

MATTHEW BARRETT

FOREWORD BY R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

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## **Foreword**

As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, I am tremendously grateful for the literature that faithful Protestant and evangelical scholars are producing that advances the great truths recovered by Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers. We must always remember that what was at stake in the Reformation was nothing less than the authority of Scripture and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many historians note that two driving principles served as the engine to Reformation theology. The material principle of the Reformation was *sola fide*—the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This central emphasis in Luther's theology was not only the truth of the gospel that liberated him from perpetual guilt and "swung open the gates of heaven" but it was also the public rally point for the Reformation. The truth that sinful man could be justified by faith alone, apart from works of the law and apart from the sacramental system of Rome, ignited the firestorm of the Reformation in sixteenth-century Europe.

Yet behind this "material principle" of the Reformation was a deeper and perhaps even more fundamental commitment—*sola Scriptura*, or the affirmation that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority for life and doctrine. Historians refer to *sola Scriptura* as the formal principle of the Reformation, the doctrine that shaped the contours of Reformation conviction. It was this commitment to the ultimate authority of Scripture that gave the Reformers the courage to separate with Rome in their proclamation of the gospel.

True Christianity and true gospel preaching depend on a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture. That is why, since the time of the Reformation, the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture have been under constant attack. In the Enlightenment, modernist philosophers like Descartes, Locke, and Kant confronted Western culture with a series of questions that ultimately transformed the notion of truth in the Western mind. The result was a totalitarian imposition of the scientific model of rationality upon all truth, the claim that only scientific data can be objectively understood, objectively defined, and objectively

defended. In other words, the modernist worldview did not allow for the notion of special revelation and openly attacked the possibility of supernatural intervention in world history. Modernity thus presented the church of the Lord Jesus Christ with a significant intellectual crisis.

In the United States, there was a quintessentially American philosophy that developed, known as pragmatism, that also challenged the ultimate authority and truthfulness of Scripture. Pragmatism was the idea that truth is a matter of social negotiation and that ideas are merely instrumental tools whose truthfulness will be determined by whether they meet the particular needs of the present time. In the eyes of the pragmatists, ideas were nothing but provisional responses to actual challenges, and truth, by definition, was relative to the time, place, need, and person.

As most of us are aware, modernity has given way to postmodernity, which is simply modernity in its latest guise. Postmodernism is nothing more than the logical extension of modernism in a new mood. Claiming that all notions of truth are socially constructed, postmodernists are committed to total war on truth itself, a deconstructionist project bent on the casting down of all religious, philosophical, political, and cultural authorities. A postmodernist ahead of his times, Karl Marx warned that in the light of modernity, "all that is solid melts into air."

The only way to escape the rationalist claims of modernism or the hermeneutical nihilism of postmodernism is the doctrine of revelation—a return to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Christians must remember that in the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture bequeathed to us by the Reformers, we can have confidence in God's Word in spite of the philosophical and theological problems of the age. God has spoken to us in a reasonable way, in language we can understand, and has given us the gift of revelation, which is his willful disclosure of himself. As Carl F. H. Henry stated, special revelation is nothing less than God's own forfeiture of his personal privacy so that we might know him.

Indeed, the war against the authority and truth of Scripture has been raging since the Reformation and has continued into our own generation. Back in 1990, theologian J. I. Packer recounted what he called a "Thirty Years' War" over the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. He traced his involvement in this war in its American context back to a conference held in Wenham, Massachusetts in 1966, when

he confronted some professors from evangelical institutions who "now declined to affirm the full truth of Scripture." That was fifty years ago, and the war over the truthfulness of the Bible is still not over—not by a long shot.

As Evangelicals, we must recognize that as the theological heirs of the Reformers, we cannot capitulate to revisionist models of the doctrine of Scripture. An affirmation of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible has stood at the center of the Reformed faith since the sixteenth century. We are those who confess along with the Reformers that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. Scripture alone is the ultimate authority for life and doctrine. In a sense, Reformed theology hangs on the accuracy of that singular proposition.

The theology of the Reformation cannot long survive without the church's explicit commitment to the authority of Scripture above all else. Without the authority of Scripture, our theological convictions are merely conjectures and our preaching becomes nothing more than a display of human folly. As the Reformers understood and taught, *sola Scriptura* is vital for the life of the church. Scripture is the fount from which flows all faithful preaching, discipleship, and worship.

Matthew Barrett's *God's Word Alone* is a faithful restatement of the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. Barrett carefully and compellingly argues for the divine inspiration and ultimate authority of Scripture. Barrett also shows that Scripture claims for itself the attributes of inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. He does all of this with careful attention to the modern theological challenges that have attempted to overthrow a biblical doctrine of Scripture. This is the type of book of which the Reformers would have been proud. This is the type of book the church needs today.

As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, my hope is that the theology of the Reformers finds new life in the modern church. The health of the church is directly connected to the strength of our commitment to the authority and truthfulness of Scripture. Let this book fuel that commitment, strengthen your confidence in God's Word, and compel you to be faithful to the gospel.

R. Albert Mohler Jr.

## Introduction

## Sola Scriptura

Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth. If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for? The more we reject it, the more we become satisfied with men's books and human teachers.

—Martin Luther

I approve only of those human institutions which are founded upon the authority of God and derived from Scripture.

—John Calvin

Sola Scriptura "is the corner-stone of universal Protestantism; and on it Protestantism stands, or else it falls."

—B. B. Warfield

"So what if everything in the Bible isn't true and reliable or from God? That doesn't really matter, does it? The Bible still remains an authority in my life." Though it has been years now, I remember hearing these words as if it were yesterday. I had no idea what to say in response.

I was shocked because I was hearing these words from a churchgoing, Bible-carrying, evangelical Christian. This person saw no relation between the truthfulness of Scripture and the authority of Scripture, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

In that moment I realized two things: First, the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is just as important today as it was in the sixteenth century. In the sixteenth century the Reformers faced off against Rome because the Roman church had elevated tradition and its magisterium to the level of Scripture. Nevertheless, Rome still believed Scripture itself was inspired by God and therefore inerrant, that is, trustworthy, true, and without error.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Rome did not use the term *inerrant*, but the concept itself was affirmed.

#### 22 God's Word Alone

Since the sixteenth century, Protestantism (and its view of the Bible) has undergone an evolution in its identity. Movements such as the Enlightenment, Liberalism, and, more recently, postmodernism have elevated other voices to the level of Scripture or even above Scripture, and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture have been abandoned, something Rome never would have done in the sixteenth century. Today, many people reject that the Bible is God-breathed and truthful in all it asserts.

As Carl Henry pointed out in his magnum opus, *God*, *Revelation*, and Authority, the church throughout history has faced repeated attacks on the Bible from skeptics, but only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's Word been questioned, criticized, and abandoned by those within the body of Christ.<sup>2</sup> To the Reformers, this would have been unthinkable, yet this is the day we live in. Not only do Bible critics pervade the culture but now they have mounted the pulpit and sit comfortably in the pews.

If Carl Henry is right, then there is legitimate cause for alarm. Repeated attacks on Scripture's own character reveal the enmity and hostility toward the God of the Bible within our own souls.<sup>3</sup> One of the most significant needs in the twenty-first century is a call back to the Bible to a posture that encourages reverence, acceptance, and adherence to its authority and message.

Along with the realization that *sola Scriptura* is just as applicable today as it was in the sixteenth century, I also saw that many Christians in the church have no idea what *sola Scriptura* is or what it entails. What is the relationship of the authority of the Bible to attributes such as inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency? Even if we accept that the Bible alone is our final authority, we may have no idea *why* this is true. Is it because the Bible is the best guidebook we can find?

These questions led me to carefully study the massive shifts in authority that have taken place since the Reformation. I wanted to better understand the relationship between biblical authority and the nature of Scripture, namely, its own inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. In this book, we will begin by exploring the past

<sup>2.</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Three, vol. 4, God, Revelation, and Authority (repr. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 17, 374.

<sup>3.</sup> J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Gerrit Bilkes and ed. M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 73.

so that we better understand the present, and we will address each of these key attributes to retrieve this indispensable doctrine for the church today.

# What is Sola Scriptura?

The title of this book is God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture, which is another way of saying sola Scriptura. But what is sola Scriptura? Sola Scriptura means that only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.

First, this means that Scripture alone is our *final* authority. Authority is a bad word in our day of rugged individualism. But the Bible is all about authority. In fact, sola Scriptura means that the Bible is our chief, supreme, and ultimate authority. Notice, however, that I didn't say the Bible is our only authority. As chapter 10 will explain more thoroughly, sola Scriptura is too easily confused today with nuda Scriptura, the view that we should have "no creed but the Bible!" Those who sing this mantra believe that creeds, confessions, the voices of tradition, and those who hold ecclesiastical offices carry no authority in the church. But this was not the Reformers' position, nor should it be equated with sola Scriptura.

Sola Scriptura acknowledges that there are other important authorities for the Christian, authorities who should be listened to and followed. But Scripture alone is our *final* authority. It is the authority that rules over and governs all other authorities. It is the authority that has the final say. We could say that while church tradition and church officials play a *ministerial* role, Scripture alone plays a *magisterial* role. This means that all other authorities are to be followed only inasmuch as they align with Scripture, submit to Scripture, and are seen as subservient to Scripture, which alone is our supreme authority.

Second, *sola Scriptura* also means that Scripture alone is our *sufficient* authority. Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, but it is the authority that provides believers with all the truth they need for salvation and for following after Christ. The Bible, therefore, is sufficient for faith and practice. This notion of the Bible's sufficiency has been powerfully articulated by Reformation and Reformed confessions. The Belgic Confession (1561) states: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man

ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein."<sup>4</sup> And the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men [Gal 1:8–9; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15–17]."<sup>5</sup> In short, the Bible is enough for us.

Third, sola Scriptura means that only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant authority.<sup>6</sup> Notice that the basis of biblical authority—the very reason why Scripture is authoritative—is that God is its divine author. The ground for biblical authority is divine inspiration. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God [1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19, 21; 1 John 5:9]." Scripture is the church's final and sufficient authority because Scripture is the Word of God. One of the most important chapters in this book for applying sola Scriptura is chapter

<sup>4. &</sup>quot;The Belgic Confession (1561)," in Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 2, 1552–1566, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 427 (article VII). Also consider two other confessions: The French Confession (1559) says that Scripture is the "rule of all truth, containing all matters necessarily required for the worship of God and our salvation," and therefore it is not right to "add unto or to take from" it ("The French Confession [1559]," in Dennison, Reformed Confessions, Volume 2, 142 [article V]). And The Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) says, "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation" ("The Thirty-Nine Articles [1562/63]," in Dennison, Reformed Confessions, Volume 2, 755 [article VI]).

<sup>5.</sup> In chapter 10 we will address the complex issue of how we make sense of sufficiency in light of general revelation, the role of the Holy Spirit, and extrabiblical sources.

<sup>6.</sup> Some will prefer to use the word *infallible* instead (which does have historical precedent). I am fine with using the word *as long as* one means, by infallible, that Scripture (in total) is not capable of erring. However, I would reject those who use the word to say that Scripture is true only in its saving message but not in its specifics (e.g., historical details). As I will explain in chapter 8, *infallible* and *inerrant* are complementary and compatible concepts, *infallible* (Scripture *cannot* err) being an even stronger word than *inerrant* (Scripture *does not* err). Therefore, I think it is historically and biblically errorneous to use the word *infallible* to convey something less than inerrancy.

<sup>7. &</sup>quot;The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 4, 1600–1693*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 235 (I.IV), emphasis added.

7, where we see why Scripture and Scripture alone (not Scripture *and* Tradition) is God-breathed and, on this basis, stands unshakable as the church's final, flawless authority. What Scripture says, God says.

To get a full picture of *sola Scriptura*, we need to go beyond saying that the Bible is inspired or God-breathed. Inspiration should lead to an understanding that the Bible is perfect, flawless, and inerrant. In other words, inerrancy is the necessary corollary of inspiration. They are two sides of the same coin, and it is impossible to divorce one from the other. Because it is God speaking—and he is a God of truth, not error—his Word must be true and trustworthy in all that it addresses.

Because inerrancy is a biblical corollary and consequence of divine inspiration—inseparably connected and intertwined—it is a necessary component to sola Scriptura.9 The God of truth has breathed out his Word of truth, and the result is nothing less than a *flawless* authority for the church. In saying this, I am aware that my inclusion of inerrancy in our definition of sola Scriptura (and in this book) will prove to be controversial, given the mixed identity of evangelicalism today. However, were we to divorce the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture from its authority, disconnecting the two as if one was unrelated to the other, then we would be left with no doctrine of sola Scriptura at all. Should Scripture contain errors, it is unclear why we should trust Scripture as our supreme and final authority. 10 And should we limit, modify, or abandon the total inerrancy of Scripture, we set in motion tremendous doubt and uncertainty regarding the Bible's competence as our final authority. The ground for the believer's confidence that all of Scripture is the Word of God is shaken.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8.</sup> In chapter 1 we will see how Rome differs in its elevation of Tradition as a second infallible source of divine revelation.

<sup>9.</sup> The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy nicely captures the relationship between inspiration and inerrancy: "Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching" ("The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], 494 [point 4 of "A Short Statement"]). Again: "We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration," Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 497 (article XV). Also consider "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and *is therefore* inerrant in the autographs" (the Evangelical Theological Society, http://www.etsjets.org/about/constitution#A3; emphasis added).

<sup>10.</sup> John Frame, The Doctrine of the Word of God (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 547; J. I. Packer, Beyond the Battle for the Bible (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone, 1980), 17.

<sup>11.</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "Limited Inerrancy: A Critical Appraisal and Constructive Alternative," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973), 145, 150, 156.

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy makes this point as well: "The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded." In other words, to reject inerrancy is to undermine confidence in the Bible's authority, and what could have more relevance to sola Scriptura than biblical authority? As Roger Nicole once exclaimed, "What is supremely at stake in this whole discussion [of inerrancy] is the recognition of the authority of God in the sacred oracles." It should not surprise us to find that in the recent history of evangelicalism, leaders have rallied around statements such as the Cambridge Declaration (1996), affirming inerrancy's inseparability from sola Scriptura in stating, "Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life," and they "reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience." 14

As we will explore more thoroughly in the first chapter, what is often missed in retellings of Luther's progress to the Diet of Worms is the question of *why* Luther's stance on Scripture was so detested by Rome. After all, Rome *also* affirmed Scripture's authority and inspiration. So what made Luther's stance on biblical authority so different and so offensive to the Roman church? The answer is that Luther had the audacity to say that *only* Scripture is the *inerrant* authority. <sup>15</sup> While

<sup>12. &</sup>quot;The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 494 (point 5 of "A Short Statement"), emphasis added.

<sup>13. &</sup>quot;Are we going to submit unconditionally to the voice of God who has spoken? Or, are we going to insist on screening the message of the Bible, accepting only what appears palatable and remaining free to reject what does not conform to our preconceived criteria?" Quoted in Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance* (Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 160, emphasis added.

<sup>14. &</sup>quot;The Cambridge Declaration," http://www.alliancenet.org/cambridge-declaration; emphasis added. The declaration was affirmed by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and signed by council members such as John Armstrong, Alistair Begg, James M. Boice, W. Robert Godfrey, John D. Hannah, Michael S. Horton, R. Albert Mohler Jr., R. C. Sproul, and David Wells, among others.

<sup>15.</sup> Some will object that Luther and the Reformers did not use the label *inerraney*, so it is anachronistic and unjustified to use this term in relation to our definition of *sola Scriptura*. Yes, it is true that the Reformers never used the term *inerraney*. However, such an objection fails to realize that though the *term* was not used, the *concept* was affirmed. The Reformers may not have fleshed out a concept of inerrancy as meticulous as we have today (after all, inerrancy was not their main battle with Rome). However, this does not mean that the basic concept of inerrancy and its most fundamental components are not present in their writings. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the words *inerrant* or *inerrancy* whenever I am referring to the Bible as a book that does not err. For Luther's affirmation of Scripture's inerrancy, see *LW* 1:121; 4:14; 12:242; 22:254, 259; 31:11, 282; 32:11, 98; 35:128, 150; 36:136–37; 39:165. For defenses of the Reformers' affirmation of inerrancy, see Robert D. Preus, "Luther

popes and councils err, Scripture alone does not! For Rome, Scripture and Tradition were *inerrant* authorities. For Luther, Scripture alone is our *inerrant* authority.

What distinguished Luther and the rest of the Reformers from church leaders in Rome was their claim that as important as tradition is (and they thought it was extremely important), tradition is not without error. That honor goes to Scripture *alone*. In fact, it is because Scripture alone is inspired by God and consequently inerrant that the Reformers believed Scripture alone is the church's *final* authority, sufficient for faith and practice.<sup>16</sup>

# **Moving Forward**

So where do we go from here? Together, we will take three steps to better understand the origins, development, and contemporary relevance of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.

First, this book will travel back in time to demonstrate that a shift in authority has taken place since the Reformation, one that has massive

and Biblical Infallibility," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 99–142; J. Theodore Mueller, "Luther and the Bible," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 87–114; Mark D. Thompson, *A Sure Ground on Which to Stand: The Relation of Authority and Interpretive Method in Luther's Approach to Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); James I. Packer, "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture," in Hannah, *Inerrancy and the Church*, 143–88; Kenneth Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," in Walvoord, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 115–55; W. Robert Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 225–43, 391–97; Roger R. Nicole, "John Calvin and Inerrancy," *JETS* 25 (1982): 425–42; Eugene F. Klung, "Word and Spirit in Luther Studies Since World War II," *TJ* 5 (1984): 3–46; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 49–100; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 2:289–90.

16. See R. C. Sproul, Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 18. To clarify, I am not saying that inerrancy is the basis on which we believe that the Bible is authoritative. Rather, as mentioned already, the Bible is authoritative because it is inspired by God. So inspiration is the basis of biblical authority. However, we should be careful that we do not then conclude that inerrancy has nothing to do with authority. Actually, the relation between inerrancy and authority is crucial. While inerrancy may not be the ground of authority, nevertheless, inerrancy is the necessary consequence of inspiration and therefore inseparably connected to inspiration (e.g., the Bible is truthful because the God who breathed it out is a God of truth). Therefore, to abandon the inerrancy of Scripture is to do untold harm to Scripture's authority, creating distrust and suspicion within the reader toward divine authorship. If the Bible contains errors, one naturally begins to question whether it is truly authoritative as well. All that is to say, while inerrancy may not be the all-sufficient basis or ground of sola Scriptura, it is a necessary and essential component due to its inseparable tie to inspiration.

*implications for today.* Part 1 begins with the Reformation and its heroic adherence to *sola Scriptura* in the face of insurmountable opposition from Rome. We will also examine the massive crisis in authority that erupted shortly after the Reformers passed from the scene, beginning with the Enlightenment, progressing through theological Liberalism, and climaxing today with postmodernism. As we shall see, a seismic, earthquaking shift in biblical authority has occurred, reorienting our ecclesiastical landscape.

While I seek to fairly and accurately represent the diverse voices of the past, I also provide critiques along the way. My aim is to show that abandonment of biblical authority has been under way since the Enlightenment, and the church is worse off because of it. What is the solution? We must retrieve and apply *sola Scriptura* to our contemporary challenges.

You will want to pay special attention to the section entitled "How Shall We Then Proceed?" at the end of chapter 3. There I explain how we can approach Scripture in contrast to many of the modern and postmodern approaches represented. I argue that we must begin by listening to what Scripture has to say about itself, rather than imposing a modern or postmodern agenda on the text. We must have an open ear to the biblical categories that Scripture itself provides as the Holy Spirit guides us in its interpretation. We must allow Scripture's own voice to affirm and correct our pre-understanding of what Scripture is and how it should be read. Such an approach pays heed to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, as well as the humility fostered by faith seeking understanding, a motto the Reformers retrieved from the church fathers.<sup>17</sup>

Second, we will incorporate a biblical theology of God's Word, and in doing so trace the redemptive-historical context for the doctrine of Scripture to show that the triune God has made himself known covenantally and his covenantal word always proves true. <sup>18</sup> By understanding the nature of God's oral and written Word in the story line of redemptive history, we are better equipped to see to how Scripture describes itself and to grasp the inherent attributes of Scripture. <sup>19</sup> In this, I make two assumptions:

<sup>17.</sup> Also note our treatment in chapter 1 of the self-authenticating nature of Scripture in our discussion of John Calvin.

<sup>18.</sup> I will use "word" to refer to God's diverse forms of speech throughout redemptive history and "Word" to specifically refer to either Scripture or Jesus Christ.

<sup>19.</sup> While we do not treat the attributes of Scripture until part 3, these attributes are

First, that God's Word is inherently and invariably *Trinitarian* in nature. Throughout redemptive history, each person of the Trinity participates in the delivery of divine revelation (see chapter 4), yet it is the Holy Spirit in particular who takes on a central role, carrying along the biblical authors so that they speak from God (2 Pet 1:21). In addition, I assume that God's Word, though communicated in a variety of ways, is undeniably *covenantal* in character. Not only does God communicate who he is and what he will do within the context of divinely initiated covenants, but Scripture itself *is* a covenantal document. As we will learn in chapters 4 and 5, Scripture is the constitution of the covenant between God and his people.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, to reject God's Word is to reject his covenant as well.<sup>21</sup> Redemptive history demonstrates that the covenantal Word of the triune God proves true. His covenantal promises, both spoken and written, will not fail, and nowhere is this more evident than in the incarnation of Christ, the Word made flesh.

Third, rather than limiting ourselves to the attribute of sufficiency (as treatments of sola Scriptura sometimes do), we will systematically explore the range of scriptural attributes in order to defend biblical authority against the many challenges it faces today. Once we see that Scripture is God-breathed, we will look to inspiration's natural corollary, the inerrancy of Scripture. As with inspiration, we will discover that the Bible affirms its own truthfulness and trustworthiness. Furthermore, as we address both inspiration and inerrancy, we will give special focus to Jesus, demonstrating that our Lord himself believed Scripture to be both God-breathed and without error. Our discussion will take us back to the doctrine of God, and we will learn that Scripture is fundamentally truthful because its divine author is a God of truth.

Last, we will turn to the attributes of clarity and sufficiency. In the wake of Rome's muddy Tiber and postmodernism's murky waters, few doctrines have been so quickly dismantled as the clarity of Scripture. Nevertheless, we will argue that when God speaks, he intends to be heard and understood. Not only is our God not silent (as Francis Schaeffer so famously put it) but the silence is broken by his clear and effective speech. Lack of clarity is not a quality to be attached to the

inseparably connected to the story line of Scripture and show themselves throughout this story as we move from the first Adam to the last Adam, Jesus Christ.

Meredith G. Kline, The Structure of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

<sup>21.</sup> See Frame, Doctrine of the Word, 356.

## 30 God's Word Alone

work of the divine architect of language. Finally, sufficiency will close our study. Few attributes have such warm and practical implications for life, putting real flesh on the skeleton of *sola Scriptura*. Having established Scripture's own testimony to its sufficiency, we will answer contemporary challenges to sufficiency from traditionalism (with a particular focus on Rome and her view of the canon) to science and reason, and finally experience and culture.

With our course mapped out, tolle lege!

# PART 1

# God's Word under Fire, Yesterday and Today

#### CHAPTER 1

# The Road to Reformation: Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth Century

While I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer . . . the Word so greatly weakened the Papacy that never a Prince or Emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing.

The Word did it all.

—Martin Luther

The foundation of our religion is the written word, the Scriptures of God.

—Huldrych Zwingli

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was founded upon the authority of the Bible, yet it set the world aflame.

—J. Gresham Machen

There they sat. Relics. Lots of them. There was a cut of fabric from the swaddling cloth of baby Jesus, thirteen pieces from his crib, a strand of straw from the manger, a piece of gold from a wise man, three pieces of myrrh, a morsel of bread from the Last Supper, a thorn from the crown Jesus wore when crucified, and, to top it all off, a genuine piece of stone that Jesus stood on to ascend to the Father's right hand. And in good Catholic fashion, the blessed Mary was not left out. There sat three pieces of cloth from her cloak, "four from her girdle," four hairs from her head, and, better yet, seven pieces from "the veil that was sprinkled with the blood of Christ." These relics and countless others (nineteen-thousand bones from the saints!) stood ready to be viewed by pious pilgrims. The relics were the proud collection of Frederick the Wise, elector of Saxony, Martin Luther's prince. And they sat in the

<sup>1.</sup> All these details come from Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1950), 53.

Castle Church at Wittenberg, prepared for showing on All Saints' Day, November 1, 1516.<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of all this fanfare was also one essential ingredient—the procurement of indulgences. Veneration of the relics was accompanied by the issuance of an indulgence, a certificate guaranteeing the buyer that time in purgatory would be reduced and remitted by up to 1,902,202 years and 270 days.<sup>3</sup> An indulgence was the full or partial remission of temporal punishment for sins. It was drawn from the Treasury of Merit, a storehouse of grace which was accumulated by the meritorious work of Christ and by the superabundant merit of the saints.<sup>4</sup>

# The Coin in the Coffer Rings

Indulgences were the bingo games of the sixteenth century. In a complicated set of political affairs involving Albert of Brandenburg, Pope Leo X utilized the selling of indulgences to fund the completion of St. Peter's Basilica, but not just any indulgence would do.<sup>5</sup> Pope Leo issued a plenary indulgence, one that would apparently return the sinner to the state of innocence first received at baptism.<sup>6</sup>

There was no one so experienced as the Dominican Johann Tetzel in

<sup>2.</sup> Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 51–54; Martin Brecht, Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1484–1521 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 175–83; Bainton, Here I Stand, 53.

<sup>3.</sup> Rupp, Luther's Progress, 51-54; Brecht, Luther: His Road, 175-83; Bainton, Here I Stand, 28-29, 53.

<sup>4. &</sup>quot;Indulgences had to do with the sacrament of penance, and only with one part of that: the works of satisfaction which the penitent sinner was required to perform in order to pay the penalty of sin. Medieval theologians distinguished between the guilt incurred by sin and the penalty that had to be paid, since no sin could go unpunished. When the guilt was forgiven by God through the absolution of the priest, the penalty of eternal condemnation was commuted into works of satisfaction which the priest then imposed upon the repentant sinner according to the seriousness of the sin committed. An indulgence was the additional prerogative of the church to release penitents from these works of satisfaction. Since the thirteenth century, the power to permit such a relaxation or 'indulgence' of the penitential obligation was derived from the 'treasury of the church.' This treasure contained the accumulated merits of Christ and the saints which, since they were superfluous for those who had originally acquired them, stood available for ordinary sinners in the church. An indulgence applied these merits to the penitent sinner and canceled the debt he would otherwise be obliged to pay off with works of satisfaction" (Scott H. Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy: Stages in a Reformation Conflict* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981], 24).

<sup>5.</sup> Brecht, Luther: His Road, 175-83; Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy, 25; Bainton, Here I Stand, 54-63.

<sup>6.</sup> Instructio Summaria, in Dokumente zum Ablasstreit, ed. W. Köhler (Tübingen, 1934), 104–16; "Summary Instruction for Indulgence Preachers," in Protestant Reformation, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 15; Brecht, Luther: His Road, 175–238.

marketing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. What exactly did the sinner receive in buying this indulgence? According to unscrupulous sellers like Tetzel, the impression was given that the indulgence would result in the total forgiveness of all sins.<sup>7</sup> Not even the sin of raping the mother of God could outweigh the efficacy of these indulgences!<sup>8</sup> Even the horrors of years in purgatory could now be removed. And if this was not good enough, one also had the opportunity to buy an indulgence slip for one's loved ones in purgatory (and one need not be penitent himself for such an indulgence to be effective).<sup>9</sup> With the appropriate amount of money, repentance was now for sale, and any sin could be covered.

Going from town to town with all the pomp of Rome, Tetzel flamboyantly laid a heavy guilt trip on his hearers: "Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, 'Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance. . . . Will you let us lie here in flames? Will you delay our promised glory?'" And then came Tetzel's catchy jingle: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." With just a quarter of a florin, you could liberate your loved one from the flames of purgatory and into the "fatherland of paradise." 10

By the end of 1517, Martin Luther had had enough. One year prior, Luther had preached against the corruption of indulgences. <sup>11</sup> This time, he would put his objections in writing for academic debate. Luther drew up ninety-five theses exposing the abuse of indulgences, denying the power and authority of the pope over purgatory, and testing whether the pope truly had the welfare of the sinner in mind. <sup>12</sup>

<sup>7.</sup> In "Summary Instruction for Indulgence Preachers" (Hillerbrand, *Protestant Reformation*, 15–18), a manual Albert prepared, this plenary indulgence is said to result in the full remission of all sins not only on this earth but in purgatory. And one need not show evidence of contrition or even go to confession. See Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 25–26, 31. Luther, however, became frustrated, given the misunderstanding this cultivated among common people. Brecht captures Luther's discontent: "The indulgence agents only demand that people pay, but they do not explain what indulgences are and what use they serve. Thus the misunderstanding arises that people are immediately saved after obtaining indulgences. But through indulgences as such one does not obtain the grace which makes one righteous or more righteous, but only the removal of penitential punishments and satisfactions. The people, though, expect indulgences to give them complete remission of sins and the kingdom of heaven, and so, by neglecting genuine repentance, they sin" (Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road*, 188–89).

<sup>8.</sup> Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy, 25-26; Bainton, Here I Stand, 59.

<sup>9.</sup> See "Summary Instruction for Indulgence Preachers," in Hillerbrand, *Protestant Reformation*, 18; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 26; Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 59.

<sup>10.</sup> John Tetzel, "A Sermon [1517]," in Hillerbrand, Protestant Reformation, 19-21.

<sup>11.</sup> Brecht, Luther: His Road, 185-86.

<sup>12.</sup> Martin Luther, Ninety-Five Theses, 1517, in LW 31:17-34; cf. Luther, Explanations

When they were finished, his theses were posted to the Castle Church door on October 31, 1517.

Despite his disagreements with the pope, Luther was just trying to be a good Catholic, reforming the Church from the clear abuses he had witnessed. At this point, Luther wasn't trying to position the authority of Scripture over the pope—at least not explicitly. Nevertheless, the seeds of confrontation had been planted. Luther was arguing that the pope did not have power over purgatory for the remission of sin or its penalty—clearly questioning the pope's authority on this matter.<sup>13</sup>

# "The Scriptures Cannot Err"

Though Luther's theses were written in Latin for academic debate, others translated them and spread them throughout Germany. Soon everyone was talking about Luther's theses.

Interpreting Luther's theses as an affront to papal authority, Tetzel called for Luther to be burned at the stake as a heretic.<sup>14</sup> Then, in a second set of theses, Tetzel defended papal authority and infallibility.<sup>15</sup> Luther's *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* would confirm Tetzel's suspicions, arguing that the pope's primacy and supremacy were not ordained by God at the genesis of the church but had evolved over time.<sup>16</sup>

Luther also traded fighting words with Sylvester Prierias, a Dominican theologian appointed by Leo X to respond to Luther's theses. It became clear to Prierias that authority was the issue at stake in all of Luther's arguments. Prierias wrote in his *Dialogue concerning the Power of the Pope*, "He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic." Luther responded by pointing out that Prierias cited no Scripture to prove his case and wrote to Prierias, "Like an insidious devil you pervert the Scriptures." Luther exposed the contradictions

of the Ninety-Five Theses, 1518, in LW 31:77-252. See also Brecht, Luther: His Road, 183-90; Rupp, Luther's Progress, 52-53; Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy, 30-31; Bainton, Here I Stand, 62-63.

<sup>13.</sup> Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy, 29-30; Brecht, Luther: His Road, 183-90; Bainton, Here I Stand, 63-65.

<sup>14.</sup> Brecht, Luther: His Road, 199, 206-7; Rupp, Luther's Progress, 54-55.

<sup>15.</sup> Brecht, Luther: His Road, 209; Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy, 35-36.

<sup>16.</sup> See Luther, Explanations, in LW 31:77-252. Cf. Bainton, Here I Stand, 72.

<sup>17.</sup> Quoted in Heiko A. Oberman, Luther: Man between God and the Devil (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 193. See also Hendrix, Luther and the Papacy, 44-52.

<sup>18.</sup> Quoted in Bainton, Here I Stand, 73.

and corruptions of the papacy by pointing to the examples of Julius II and his "ghastly shedding of blood," as well as the "outrageous tyranny of Boniface VIII." Luther then asked Prierias, "If the Church consists representatively in the cardinals, what do you make of a general council of the whole Church?"<sup>19</sup>

It's important to remember that papal infallibility would not be declared official dogma until the First Vatican Council in 1870.<sup>20</sup> However, Prierias's response to Luther shows how many already believed the pope was infallible and inerrant whenever he spoke *ex cathedra* ("from the seat" as the vicar of Christ on earth).<sup>21</sup> As Martin Brecht explains, not only were the Roman church and pope considered infallible, but "the authority of the church stood explicitly above that of the Scriptures," even authorizing the Scriptures.<sup>22</sup> On this point too Luther disagreed with Prierias, not only appealing to Scripture's authority but also to Augustine's letter to Jerome where Augustine elevates Scripture's authority, emphasizing that the Bible alone is inspired by God and without error.<sup>23</sup> The "radicalism" of Luther's reply to Prierias "lies not in its invective but in its affirmation that the pope might err and a council might err and that only Scripture is the final authority."<sup>24</sup>

Following his dispute with Prierias, Luther faced off against the Dominican cardinal Cajetan, perhaps the most impressive theologian of the Roman Curia. They met in October of 1518 in Augsburg, and an argument between the two lasted for several days. <sup>25</sup> Luther was commanded to recant, which he would not do. When Cajetan confronted Luther with Pope Clement VI's bull *Unigenitus* (1343)—a bull that, according to Cajetan, affirmed that "the merits of Christ are a treasure

<sup>19.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20.</sup> Tierney argues that there "is no convincing evidence that papal infallibility formed any part of the theological or canonical tradition of the church before the thirteenth century; the doctrine was invented in the first place by a few dissident Franciscans because it suited their convenience to invent it; eventually, but only after much initial reluctance, it was accepted by the papacy because it suited the convenience of the popes to accept it." Brian Tierney, *Origins of Papal Infallibility*, 1150–1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty and Tradition in the Middle Ages, ed. Heiko A. Oberman, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 281.

<sup>21.</sup> To clarify, Rome did not believe the pope was infallible and inerrant by virtue of his own righteousness, but only by speaking *ex cathedra*. See Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 110.

<sup>22.</sup> Brecht, Luther: His Road, 243.

<sup>23.</sup> George, Reading Scripture, 111.

<sup>24.</sup> Bainton, Here I Stand, 74.

<sup>25.</sup> See Martin Luther, Proceedings at Augsburg 1518, in LW 31:253-92.

of indulgences"—Luther rejected it along with Pope Clement's authority. "I am not so audacious," said Luther, "that for the sake of a single obscure and ambiguous decretal of a human pope I would recede from so many and such clear testimonies of divine Scripture. For, as one of the canon lawyers has said, 'in a matter of faith not only is a council above a pope but any one of the faithful, if armed with better authority and reason.'" When Cajetan responded that Scripture must be interpreted by the pope who is above not only councils but Scripture itself, Luther replied, "His Holiness abuses Scripture. I deny that he is above Scripture." Harold Grimm summarizes the conflict this way: "The more Cajetan insisted upon the infallibility of the papacy the more Luther relied upon the authority of Scripture."

Luther's greatest challenge would come the following year at the Leipzig debate with the Catholic disputant Johannes von Eck.<sup>28</sup> Though the debate would formally be an engagement between Eck and Andreas Karlstadt, Luther anticipated that he would have an opportunity to participate. After all, Eck's real target was Luther himself.<sup>29</sup> In the months leading up to the debate, Luther rigorously prepared himself, knowing that papal supremacy was the critical point under debate. In his research Luther had to address two key passages Rome relied on: (1) In Matthew 16:18-19 Jesus calls Peter the "rock" that he will build his church on, conferring upon Peter the "keys of the kingdom." According to Rome, here Jesus teaches that Peter is the first pope, giving to Peter (and his successors by default) the foundational position in the erection of his church. Since Peter (and by implication all future popes) is given the "keys of the kingdom," the pope possesses supreme authority and control over the church and infallibly exercises that authority as the supreme ruler when he teaches as the vicar of Christ on earth. (2) In John 21:15-19 Jesus tells Peter to "feed my lambs." Again, Rome saw Jesus as conferring on Peter the exclusive right to exercise power over the church.

Luther, however, rejected these interpretations. He believed that

<sup>26.</sup> As quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 80. For the debate over the Bull *Unigenitus*, see Rupp, *Luther's Progress*, 61; Hendrix, *Luther and the Papacy*, 59–61; Brecht, *Luther: His Road*, 252–55.

<sup>27.</sup> Luther, Proceedings at Augsburg, in LW 31:256 (cf. 262, 284–85). See also Brecht, Luther: His Road, 263–65.

<sup>28.</sup> See Martin Luther, The Leipzig Debate, in LW 31:307-325.

<sup>29.</sup> Brecht, Luther: His Road, 299-322.

#### ZONDERVAN

God's Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture Copyright © 2016 by Matthew M. Barrett

This title is also available as a Zondervan ebook.

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Barrett, Matthew, 1982- author.

Title: God's word alone—the authority of scripture: what the reformers taught . . . and

why it still matters / Matthew Barrett.

Description: Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. | Series: The five Solas series | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016012911 | ISBN 9780310515722 (softcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible—Evidences, authority, etc. | Reformed Church—Doctrines.

Classification: LCC BS480 .B3545 2016 | DDC 220.1/3—dc23 LC record available at

https://lccn.loc.gov/2016012911

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Cover design: Christopher Tobias/Outerwear for Books

Interior design: Kait Lamphere

Printed in the United States of America

God's Word Alone is both a fitting tribute to its Reformation sola name-sake and a constructive contribution to the doctrine of Scripture in its own right. Sola Scriptura has become something of a whipping concept in contemporary theology, but Barrett's book goes a long way to correcting modern and postmodern caricatures of the doctrine. I particularly appreciated the chapters on the Reformers' own understanding of Scripture as the supreme and final authority for the church and how this is rooted in its being the only wholly reliable authority, a consequence of its nature as divinely authored and inspired. Barrett here covers all the theological bases—biblical, historical, and systematic—as one might expect of a home run.

KEVIN J. VANHOOZER, Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Perhaps the greatest crisis in the evangelical world today is the loss of any meaningful commitment to the functional authority of Scripture. While lip service is paid to biblical "inspiration" and perhaps even some sense of the Bible's "infallibility," the final, functional authority of inerrant Scripture to govern both our beliefs and behavior has gradually disappeared. This alone makes Matthew Barrett's book on *sola Scriptura* so essential to the church in our day. If the Bible, and the Bible alone, isn't our final and determinative authority, the church will have lost its bearings and be cast hopelessly adrift on the sea of personal subjectivity. It is a massive understatement to say this book is much needed today. I cannot recommend it too highly.

SAM STORMS, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City, OK

The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's nailing the ninety-five theses to the door of the chapel of the Wittenberg Castle provides an eminently suitable occasion to remind ourselves of one of the five *solas* of the Reformation: *sola Scriptura*, "Scripture alone." Matthew Barrett takes his readers through some of the controversies surrounding the Bible that have arisen across this last half millennium and competently demonstrates the relevance of the doctrine of Scripture in our day. In the final analysis, the issue is revelation: What is the locus of God's gracious self-disclosure—God generously giving up his privacy, as Carl Henry used to say?

D. A. CARSON, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School Matthew Barrett's *God's Word Alone* is a comprehensive discussion of the nature and role of Scripture. He deals with the church's historical controversies, especially during the Reformation period, with the place of God's speech during the history of redemption, and with all the topics of current discussion including inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. Barrett's knowledge is very broad and his position thoroughly biblical. I pray that God will give it a wide distribution.

JOHN M. FRAME, J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary Orlando

The Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura* teaches that the Bible is the only infallible and sufficient rule for Christian faith and practice. Matthew Barrett's new study provides persuasive evidence that this doctrine is firmly rooted not only in the Reformation but in the early church and in Scripture itself. In very readable prose, Barrett graciously provides thoughtful and nuanced responses to the objections of critics of this doctrine. Moreover, he demonstrates that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy has resided as a central teaching of the Western churches since the patristic era. This is a welcomed and much-needed resource for Christians in a day in which much confusion exists regarding the doctrines of *sola Scriptura* and biblical inerrancy. For this reason, the volume belongs in the libraries not only of teachers, seminary students, and pastors but laypersons as well. Highly recommended.

JOHN D. WOODBRIDGE, Research Professor of Church History and Christian Thought, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois

This book—what a feast! Appetizing opening chapters recount how the Bible's authority came to be trashed in the modern West, even in many church circles. Then comes the main course: how God's saving work and presence have always intertwined with his written Word. Lastly, dessert: tasty slices of Scripture's truth, clarity, and sufficiency. A world awash in error and self-destruction cries out for meaning and direction. This book shows why skepticism of Scripture is a bad idea, and why devoting ourselves to studying, living, and spreading the Word of God

written—inspired, inerrant, and authoritative—holds such promise, for this world and the next.

ROBERT W. YARBROUGH, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

Matthew Barrett's book on the authority of Scripture is a welcome addition to the growing number of recent books on Scripture. I loved the richly theological texture of the book. From beginning to end we are treated to a deep and careful reflection on what is entailed in the recognition of Scripture as the Word of God written. The Bible's own teaching rightly has a prominent place. The teaching of the Reformers is appropriately a particular interest, given the series in which this volume appears. Modern and postmodern challenges, and the detailed, informed responses that have been made to them, are given due attention. Yet Barrett keeps drawing the lines of connection to the person and character of the God whose word Scripture is. Assaults on the Word of God go back to the garden of Eden. Ultimately they each involve an assault upon the person, character, and purpose of God even when this is not the conscious intent of those involved. Here is an articulate, informed, edifying, and persuasive account of why the Reformation doctrine of sola Scriptura should be taught, celebrated, and defended—not only against those who would deny it but also against those who claim to hold it while perhaps defining it in a way that unwittingly exalts the individual ("Scripture alone" doesn't mean "me alone"). I expect to be recommending this book often.

MARK D THOMPSON, Principal, Moore Theological College, Sydney

Without belief in Scripture alone as our supreme and trustworthy authority, the very faith of the church must totter. Dr. Barrett has mounted an impressive defence of the key Reformation doctrine of Scripture, demonstrating just how vital it remains today. This book will do great good in grounding the faith of a new generation.

MICHAEL REEVES, President and Professor of Theology, Union School of Theology, Oxford, England

Sometimes the doctrine of Scripture is treated as separate from the other doctrines of Christianity—as a sort of preamble to the faith. Helpfully, Barrett draws in the Bible's own Trinitarian, covenantal, and

salvation-historical themes to offer a persuasive alternative to various attempts to evade scriptural authority. It's an argument, to be sure, but also an edifying essay that helps us to understand what we're doing when we submit our reason to God's judging and saving speech.

MICHAEL HORTON, J. G. Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California; author of *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* 

I welcome this fresh study of the formal principle of the Reformation—the belief that God's written Word is the inspired norm by which all other religious authorities and traditions must be judged. Evangelicals are gospel people and Bible people, and this book shows why adherence to the latter is crucial for the advance of the former.

TIMOTHY GEORGE, founding dean, Beeson Divinity School of Samford University; general editor of the *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* 

On the foundation of a careful examination of the confession of biblical authority and challenges to that confession from the Reformation through postmodern debates within evangelical circles, Barrett's work sets for a nuanced proposal for the utterly reliable, error-free Scriptures which center on God's coming to earth as Jesus Christ. Barrett's Trinitarian presentation of the metanarrative from creation in Genesis to the last day in Revelation offers readers useful patterns for presenting and applying the Bible and its message within the twenty-first-century context.

ROBERT KOLB, Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

Every generation must think afresh what the foundations of its faith are. The Bible is the unchanging Word of God, but our perceptions of its role and relevance deepen as we confront new challenges that our mission to the world throws up. In this clearly presented and closely argued book, Dr. Barrett takes us through the main issues of our time, showing how and why they have arisen and offering ways and means by which they may be addressed. This is a key work and a valuable resource for pastors, teachers, and students alike.

GERALD BRAY, Research Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University



SALVATION AS A GIFT OF GOD

What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters

# CARL TRUEMAN

MATTHEW BARRETT, SERIES EDITOR

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# **Foreword**

Carl Trueman has given us a rich, variegated exposition of the second sola of the Reformation, sola gratia, which is uniquely captivating and, as such, will leave the reader with a deepened and enduring understanding of grace that will not be easily forgotten or effaced. The reasons for this are several.

First, Dr. Trueman's exposition of key biblical texts clears away the haze of sentimental abstractions that cloud much of the present day understanding of the doctrine of grace. Trueman does this by firmly grounding the doctrine in the blood-drenched soil of both Testaments as he first expounds God's unilateral actions in the Genesis narrative beginning with the fall—when God clothed Adam and Eve with the raw, bloodied hides of animals that he had slain to cover the sinful couple. He shows that this primeval precedent appeared again in the heart of patriarchal history in the Abrahamic covenant when God himself elected to pass between the bloody, flayed sacrifices, indicating the covenant's divinely gracious, unconditional nature. In concert with this, the sacrificial system later instituted at Sinai was wholly the result of divine grace. God took the initiative to reach down to man to create, establish, and regulate the sacrificial system to graciously serve and satisfy his justice. The roots of the system in primeval and patriarchal history are evident in the sacrifices being raw and bloody affairs. And, in Trueman's evocative words, the theological lesson from the Old Testament is this: "Sin is violent lethal rebellion against God; and biblical grace is God's violent, raw, and bloody response."

This places the New Testament's account of the blood-drenched cross of Christ as the towering center of redemptive history, as the supreme action of God, and as the crowning manifestation of his costly grace. Grace cannot be imagined (much less referenced) apart from

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Christ. This lays to rest the sentimental notion that grace is a benign overlooking of sin or an impersonal mechanistic process.

The second reason that this book will enlarge the reader's understanding and appropriation of grace is Trueman's enthralling theological tour of how grace came to be understood and appropriated over the centuries, beginning with Augustine's Confessions and concluding with Calvin's Institutes. The tour includes: a) Augustine's seismic conversion, his experience of overwhelming grace, and his understanding that God had converted him, which then drew the fire of Pelagius and providentially occasioned Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Writings, in which he crafted the exegetical and theological grounds of the doctrine of grace; b) the medieval contribution of Thomas Aquinas, who through the use of Aristotelian logic formulated an enriched scriptural understanding of grace (undergirded by the doctrine of predestination) that is in profound continuity with the theology of Augustine; c) the theological development of Martin Luther midst the arcane currents of his late medieval environment and his mature understanding of justification by grace through faith, wherein the act of faith must, necessarily, be an act of sovereign grace; d) though Luther firmly held to predestination, divisions among the Lutherans over the doctrine meant that theological reflection passed to the Reformed and became identified with John Calvin, who though he offered no innovations, adorned it with clarity, maintaining that election, predestination, and grace must only be contemplated in Christ.

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# Introduction

The language of grace so permeates the Bible and all traditions of Christian theology that to claim that salvation is by grace alone is, in itself, to claim very little at all. It does not distinguish Augustine from Pelagius, Thomas Aquinas from Gabriel Biel, Martin Luther from Desiderius Erasmus, or William Perkins from James Arminius. What distinguishes them is how grace is understood. There is therefore a need for definition, lest grace become merely an empty piece of theological rhetoric. Indeed, unlike "faith alone," "grace alone" as a simple phrase is unlikely to provoke much controversy among anyone who claims the name Christian.<sup>1</sup>

This became apparent to me while watching the news program *Morning Joe* a few years ago. One of the guests that day was a well-known pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America, who was being interviewed about his new book on grace. This pastor spent around eight minutes talking about grace but never actually defined what it is and, crucially, never mentioned the name of Jesus Christ. Those lacking a theological background would have come away with the impression that grace was simply a divine sentiment, a decision or a tendency in God to overlook sin as an overindulgent parent might when dealing with a naughty child. Grace seemed to be nothing more than God turning a blind eye to human rebellion. It was as if grace were a free pass to do whatever one chooses.

As we shall see from looking at what the Bible teaches about grace and looking at how the greatest theologians of the Christian tradition have articulated it, grace is far more than a mere attitude or sentiment in God. God does not turn a blind eye to human rebellion. In fact, he tackles it head-on in the person and work of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible constantly connects grace to Christ, and the best theologians of the

<sup>1.</sup> For a treatment of sola fide, see Thomas R. Schreiner, Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

Christian faith have always made this connection central to their understanding and articulation of grace. To talk about grace is to talk about Christ. The pastor I listened to in that interview may have used the word "grace" several times, but the absence of any reference to Christ should be a clue that he was not talking about the biblical concept.

In this work, part of a series on the five *solas* of the Reformation, I will explore the notion of grace with an overview of grace as it is found in the Bible. Then, we will spend a significant time looking at grace as it has been articulated throughout church history, finishing with the Reformation. I've chosen to end the historical discussion with the Reformation not because I regard the Reformation as some peculiarly pristine golden age or as the zenith of church life. I do this because I believe the basic patterns of Protestant and evangelical understandings of grace are sufficiently developed in the Reformation to allow us to draw lessons for the present day.

In the first part of the book, we look at the biblical understanding of grace and the historical development of grace from Augustine through the Reformation.

Chapter 1 gets us started with an overview of the biblical references to, and teaching on, grace. It provides a brief but necessary grounding in the biblical understanding of grace. Grace is constituted by God's action, supremely God's action in Christ.

Chapters 2 and 3 begin our look at the historical understandings of grace, starting with Augustine. We look at his masterpiece, the *Confessions*, a work of reflective autobiography that contains what we might characterize as an intuitive understanding of sin and grace. It has proved to be a profoundly influential work, not only in Christian circles but also in the genre of psychological autobiography and the understanding of the self. In this volume we look at it in relation to Augustine's view of sin and grace, and the controversy this triggered with the Welsh monk Pelagius and his followers. The Pelagian controversy, as it is now known, offered Augustine the opportunity to sharpen and elaborate his views of grace and to do so in a way that was to have unparalleled influence in the West. As Benjamin Warfield later claimed, the Reformation was the triumph of Augustine's view of grace over his view of the church.

Chapter 4 is a look at the thought of Thomas Aquinas. While Aquinas's thinking on grace was vast and complex, embracing his view of the sacraments, our focus here is on his general view of grace. Aquinas understood grace as that which brings the creature to glory, an end beyond the one for which he is fitted by mere nature and beyond his ability as a fallen creature. Aquinas is alien territory for many Protestants, but his understanding of grace is helpful, demonstrating that Augustinian understandings of God's sovereignty were alive and well in the Middle Ages.

Chapters 5 and 6 address the time of the Reformation, and I pay particular attention to the clash between Luther and Erasmus on the bondage of the will and the views of Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, and the Reformed confessions on predestination. Crucial to the Reformation is the way in which Augustinian views of grace and predestination were picked up by the Reformers to serve a new purpose: the assurance of salvation. This was, perhaps, the Reformation's single most important experiential insight into the Christian faith. Chapter 6 also addresses the dissolution of the anti-Pelagian tradition of Protestantism with the arrival of Arminianism.

The second half of the book looks at grace and the church. Chapters 7 through 10 are devoted to the practical implications of a Reformation understanding of grace: the church and then the means of grace. Chapter 7 looks at the church as something God does, the new creation, an act of God's grace toward us and not (as we often instinctively think of it) the response of human beings to God. Chapter 8 deals with the word preached as God's means of accomplishing his purposes. Chapter 9 makes a case for taking the sacraments more seriously. And chapter 10 explains why prayer is also to be considered a means of God's grace. The conclusion wraps things up, drawing some practical lessons from what we've learned throughout the book.

Grace is the heart of the Christian gospel. It is a doctrine that touches the very depths of human existence because it not only reveals to us the very heart of God but draws us back into that precious communion with him that was so tragically lost at the fall. It is my hope that this little book will help guide you not only into a better doctrinal understanding of the issue but also give you a more glorious vision of the God whom you worship.

#### CHAPTER 1

# Grace in the Bible

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Titus 2:11

I am by calling a professor of church history and the pastor of a local church. Thus, the bulk of this book will play to what are, if not my strengths, at least the areas in which I am probably most competent: history and ecclesiology. Yet even as the subject of the book, grace alone, points us inevitably to matters of history and practice, above all it points us to the Scriptures. And that is appropriate. I write as a Protestant, an heir of the Reformation, and thus as one committed not simply to the principle of *grace alone* but also to *Scripture alone*. All theology must therefore be normed or regulated by the teaching of Scripture. Thus, while the historical heroes of the tale I tell are Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformers, they were motivated by the desire to understand and to proclaim what God had taught about grace in the inspired words of his Scriptures. For this reason, it is important to start our study by addressing the issue of the Bible's own teaching about grace.

A search for the word "grace" and its cognates in the English Standard Version yields over 150 occurrences throughout the Old and New Testaments, with the vast majority in the latter. Indeed, "grace" as a specific term is a relatively rare occurrence in the Old Testament. And yet we should not allow ourselves to be misled by such a crude approach into concluding that the concept of grace does not pervade the whole of the Bible from beginning to end. A search for the term "Trinity" reveals no occurrence of the word at all, yet no orthodox Christian would deny that the concept is a vital part of the Bible's teaching. Thus it is with

<sup>1.</sup> For a treatment of *sola Scriptura*, see Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone—The Authority of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

grace: grace permeates Scripture as one of the most important teachings about God and his relationship to his creation.

In fact, as we start to look at Scripture's teaching on grace, we might characterize it at the start by saying that it has a twofold theological significance in the Bible. First, it most typically means the unmerited favor of God. Perhaps we might, with all due reverence, say that in this way grace speaks of God's attitude toward his creation and toward his people. When thinking of grace in this sense, Reformed theologians have made a further distinction between common grace, referring to God's unmerited but nonsalvific favor toward the fallen creation that restrains evil and allows human beings to flourish in this earthly realm, and special grace, referring to God's unmerited salvific favor exhibited in and through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, grace can mean the active outworking of God's unmerited favor in the life of the church and of the believer. Here the language of grace refers to the work of God in those to whom he has an attitude of saving favor. He does not just save us from our sins, but he also matures us in the faith and uses us to bring glory to his name even while here on earth. Yet this too is ultimately the gracious work of God. Thus, these two meanings are intimately connected: it is because we are saved by grace that grace then works in our lives to accomplish God's purposes for us. The Christian life originates in God's grace and is lived by God's grace. And this is true of both Old and New Testaments.<sup>2</sup>

# Grace in the Old Testament

In English translations of the Old Testament, while the noun "grace" is rare, the adjective "gracious" is more common.<sup>3</sup> This is because God's grace is not an attribute of God's nature in the way that, say, omnipotence or omniscience are such. Grace is intimately connected to the fact that human beings are fallen and thus deserve the wrath and judgment of God. Grace, we might say, is a response, an application of God's character

It is worth noting here that in the Roman Catholic Church grace is very closely connected to the sacraments as the means whereby grace is mediated to the individual Christian. This is very different to the notion of grace as the subjective work of the Holy Spirit that we find in Protestantism and that is not inextricably attached to the sacraments in the same manner at all.

<sup>3.</sup> The Hebrew term *khen*, which is typically translated as "grace," carries the meaning of "favor," as does the verb khanan and its cognates.

and attributes, to human rebellion. Grace is that aspect of divine action by which God blesses his rebellious creatures, whether through preservation (common grace) or salvation (special grace). It characterizes the manner in which he deals with those who through their rejection of him as their Creator and sovereign deserve nothing from him and yet whom he still chooses to bless. In salvation in particular the character of grace is manifest. A loving God, faced with the rebellion of his creatures, desires to bring them back into communion with himself. Yet his holiness cannot simply allow their sin to pass without response, for if God allows our unholy rejection of him to stand, he is contradicting his own holy nature. The answer is grace: action on God's part, motivated by love and shaped by holiness, which takes account of the seriousness of sin yet brings sinners back into communion with him.

In short, if the world did not exist and had never fallen, God could not be said to be gracious. An older generation of theologians would have referred to this as a relational attribute of God, one that only exists in relation to something other than God. It describes an active disposition toward that other thing.

When the Lord passes before Moses at Sinai in Exodus 34:6–7, he proclaims himself to be gracious:

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and the fourth generation.

Here the Lord describes himself as gracious and merciful, two ways of saying essentially the same thing. But notice the reason he declares this. In the face of human sin and rebellion, the Lord has chosen not to exact justice, as he is entitled to do. He has chosen instead to be gracious and merciful. In other words, he has decided to show unmerited favor toward those who do not deserve it, and in his words to Moses he reminds his people of that very fact. The gracious disposition of God lies at the heart of the many biblical benedictions that have been pronounced over God's people throughout the years.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4.</sup> Theologians typically make a distinction between "mercy" and "grace." They regard

God's merciful grace to his people pervades the Old Testament narrative, from the moment he allows Adam and Eve to live after they have sinned, through his loving preservation of his people Israel in the face of their frequent grumblings and rebellions, up to the coming of the Christ. Grace also provides the background to one of the most famous examples of prophetic petulance. When Jonah goes reluctantly to Nineveh to call the Ninevites to repentance and the Lord consequently spares the city and its inhabitants, Jonah is furious. The ground of his complaint is ironic: he claims that he knew that the Lord would do this because he understood, echoing Exodus 34:6, that God was a gracious God (Jonah 4:2). It's ironic because it was only the fact of God's graciousness that meant Jonah himself could enjoy the relationship with the Lord that he did. What Jonah took for granted he begrudged to others.

The story of Jonah is a very human one. As the great cynic Gore Vidal once said, every time he heard of the success of a friend, a little piece of him died. Vidal touches on something very true: there is a part of us as sinful human beings that hates the success of others; and to see the grace of God so gloriously displayed in the lives of the Ninevites was more than Jonah could bear. Yet Jonah's reaction is only so ugly because God's grace is so beautiful. An entire city of sleazy, corrupt, vile human beings is yet delivered from judgment and brought into joyful communion with God. The story is not so much about Jonah's bitterness of soul as it is about God's glorious grace.

### **Grace and Covenant**

At the heart of the Old Testament teaching on God's grace is God's covenant with his people. The covenant provides the historical revelation, thread, and structure to God's gracious dealings. The Abrahamic covenant ceremony described in Genesis 15 is both conventional and highly unusual. On the one hand, it was typical for ancient Near Eastern covenants to be ratified by the cutting in two of sacrificial animals, between which the covenanting parties would

<sup>&</sup>quot;grace" as the goodness of God shown to people irrespective of what they actually deserve. "Mercy" is the unmerited goodness of God toward those who have sinned and are guilty. The distinction is a fine one and perhaps not greatly significant. Mercy, we might say, is a specific form of grace.

pass as a way of saying, "If we break the terms of the covenant, may we be torn in two as these creatures have been!" Yet in Genesis 15, Abram does not pass between the carcasses; only the Lord does this. In taking this action, the Lord unconditionally and unilaterally pledges himself to Abram and his descendants. As we see in the New Testament, this action prefigures the work of God in Christ on the cross at Calvary, where he takes up the penalty for our sins in the fulfillment of the covenant.

The covenant becomes the key to the administration of God's grace at several important moments in Israel's history. In 2 Kings 13, we read of how Hazael, king of Syria (whom the Lord had raised up to discipline his own people, 1 Kgs 19:15-17), had been oppressing the kingdom of Israel. We are told that the Lord decided to be gracious toward his people and to preserve them "because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (v. 23). In other words, the basis for God's gracious dealings with his people in the midst of their continual sin and rebellion was the covenant promises he had made to the patriarchs. Righteous kings such as Hezekiah realized this, and in 2 Chronicles 30 we see him citing God's gracious covenant when he called the nation to repentance. The Jews were conscious of their covenant history with God and deeply aware that these promises formed the basis of their gracious standing before him.

Given the importance of the covenant in God's gracious dealings with his people, the narrative of God's grace toward them was vital to Israel's identity. It shaped what we might call the liturgical life of the nation, both in the stories that it told about itself in the home and in the great declarations that it made in public before the nation and before the world. In Exodus 12 Moses points the people toward a time when their descendants will have no firsthand memory of the events of the exodus and no immediate understanding of the meaning of the Passover meal. In this context, he instructs them to recite and retell the story of God's great rescue of his people from Egypt. When a new generation asks, "Who are we?" the answer is clear: "We are God's special people whom he graciously rescued from slavery in Egypt." God's grace forms the foundation of their national identity. They are a people formed by grace and sustained by grace.

# Grace, Confession, and Benediction

We also see this when we look at the foundational Jewish confession of faith in the Old Testament, the Shema of Deuteronomy 6. In reciting the words of the Shema, the people declare that God is one, followed by the command to love him and a warning not to forget the great and gracious acts of deliverance that the Lord had performed for his people. The identity of God's people is established by their history, and their history is one of God's gracious, unmerited, unilateral saving action toward them. They are, to put it simply, the people of God's grace. Grace is essential to their identity. When they recall who God is, they must necessarily remember what he has done for them. Their identity starts not in their own activities, but in the prior action of God toward them.

Israel is who she is because she is the object of divine grace, and this truth is central to the great blessing that is to be given to the people, the Aaronic benediction of Numbers 6:24–26:

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

Even today, these words are frequently spoken at the close of worship services in Protestant churches, precisely because they remind the people of who they are—sinners who have received the free favor of God and have been made his people. The benediction points people to the grace of God, by which they approach him. When fallen, sinful creatures come before God, they need to be reminded that God is gracious toward them, that he chooses to bless them not for any merit they possess in themselves but simply because he, the Lord, has chosen to be merciful to them. God does not treat them as their sin and rebellion deserve. God is a God of grace, and his grace defines what it means for them to be the people of God.

The blessing of Numbers 6 was originally given to the Aaronic priesthood, and this ties it closely to the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament. We should note this because we have a tendency today to reduce grace to a kind of divine sentiment. This reduction of grace cheapens forgiveness. We wrongly believe that apologizing will be sufficient to cover the evil of our sin. But grace is far more than a sentimental notion. Grace is connected to God's being and God's action, especially God's action in Christ. It is therefore costly and not to be treated in a light fashion as if it were something cheap.<sup>5</sup>

#### Grace and Sacrifice

In contrast to cheap sentimentalism, God's grace in the Old Testament is more than a whim or a spineless capitulation to human rebellion. God does not ignore the problem of sin and pretend it does not exist. He feels a holy anger and wrath toward sin and cannot simply pardon the rejection of his rule as if it had never happened. So there is need for atoning action to deal with the transgressions of his mandates. Thus, God establishes a sacrificial system under Moses, the supreme manifestation of which is the Day of Atonement, detailed in Leviticus 16, whereby sin might be addressed. God himself creates the sacrificial system, he regulates it via his word and elect priesthood, and ultimately, it is God who chooses to accept the sacrifices presented to him.

This fact—that God is the one who establishes and regulates the sacrificial system—should not be ignored. It's significant because it teaches us that the Old Testament sacrifices were not an attempt by human beings to find something that would placate or cajole an angry God. We wrongly imagine that God was angry with his people and they somehow discovered ways to twist his arm and earn his favor despite their sin. The Scriptures teach us that it was God who took the initiative, revealing how sinful humans could relate to him. He established the content, the terms, and the results of the sacrifices because his wrath needed to be satisfied in a particular way. This initiative is further evidence of his grace and favor toward his people. This is not humanity reaching up to God but God reaching down to humanity, an action completely

<sup>5.</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer memorably distinguishes between cheap grace and costly grace: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting to-day for costly grace.... Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner.... [Costly grace] is *costly* because it cost God the life of his Son" (*The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller [New York: Touchstone, 1995], 43, 45).

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founded in God's unmerited favor toward his people. He establishes *by grace* the sacrifices which serve to satisfy his justice.

The gracious activity of God does not begin with the sacrificial system instituted under Moses, of course. Hints of this are found even earlier in the Old Testament. We first see God's grace on display when God confronts Adam and Eve in the garden after the fall. Adam and his wife have made themselves clothes out of leaves in an attempt to cover their shame. When God approaches, he does not accept their coverings, yet he does not immediately wipe them from the face of the earth either. Instead, he slays animals and covers Adam and Eve with the skins of the animals so that their sinful nakedness might be covered. God deals with the immediate problem of their guilt in the manner of his own choosing. In other words, he provides the solution to the problem of Adam's sin. In Genesis 3, for all his wrath at Adam's rebellion, he is revealed to be a gracious God who saves his people through animal sacrifice. These themes recur throughout the Scriptures, as we find again in Genesis 22, for example. After God has asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son to the Lord, Abraham makes the portentous statement that God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen 22:8). Again, we see God revealed as gracious because he provides for his people what they cannot provide for themselves—the sacrifice required for sin. Grace and sacrifice are inextricably linked throughout God's dealings with his Old Testament people.

It is perhaps worth pausing here for a moment and reflecting on the existential implications of the fact that sacrifice is connected to salvation and grace. Sacrifices were raw and bloody affairs. It is often said by opponents of the meat industry that more people would be vegetarians if they had to kill the animals they eat. That is probably true because slaughtering an animal is a dramatic and powerful event, especially when it is done by knife rather than by gun. It involves violence and, quite literally, blood and guts. Imagine the impact on Adam and Eve of being clothed with the raw, bloodied hides of the animals slain by God to cover them. This would have been quite a contrast to the leaves they had chosen for themselves. The Lord was signaling to them that their actions had catastrophic consequences beyond their wildest nightmares. And imagine being present at a sacrifice and seeing the lifeblood literally

pour out of a lamb. It is one thing to understand the cultic and doctrinal significance of sacrifice. It is quite another to witness it firsthand.

Human alienation from God is something that affects us at the deepest level, and it is a problem of catastrophic proportions. The anodyne, coolly objective ways in which we discuss sacrifice in the lecture room, or the transformation of the cross into an item of costume jewelry, are eloquent testimonies to the way we have turned the problem of the human condition and the response of God's grace into ideas that verge on being mere abstractions. The violent nature of sacrifice stands in judgment on the inadequacy of such conceptions and reminds us of the powerful, existential dimension of human rebellion and divine grace. Sin is violent, lethal rebellion against God; and biblical grace is God's violent, raw, and bloody response.

# **Grace and Prayer**

Human beings are sinful and deserve nothing but justice and wrath at the hands of God. Yet as we have seen, God's gracious action is both the response to sin and that which gives Israel its basic identity. So it should not surprise us to find that grace becomes a staple of the piety of the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament narratives, Psalms, and in the Prophets, we find God's people crying out to the Lord in their prayers, pleading for him to be gracious.

Prayer is, of course, closely attached to the notion of sacrifice. We must not forget this, for to do so would be to detach prayer from its position in God's overall gracious action and also to lose that powerful, raw, existential aspect that we noted above in regard to the nature of sacrifice. If grace is not empty sentiment, then neither is prayer a sentimental action. How often on news reports do we see examples of human suffering with the response that people are praying for the victims? While the response is in a sense a good one, it is hard not to wonder whether phrases such as "our thoughts and prayers are with the victims" are really just another way of saying "we feel very badly for the victims and want to express our solidarity with them and their loved ones." That is not biblical prayer. Biblical prayer rests on God's grace and thus on God's character as expressed in his saving actions toward his people and as shown forth in the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament.

This is why the primary place of prayer in the Old Testament is the tabernacle and then the temple, the places where God dwells in covenant with his people and where sacrifices are offered to him. The temple was a house of prayer (Isa 56:7; cf. Matt 21:13). It was also the place where prayers were answered. The existential confusion of the psalmist over the apparent prosperity of the wicked, for example, is resolved when he takes his questions to God's sanctuary (Ps 73:16–17). We can only speculate as to what precisely happened to him in the temple to solve his problem, but it was surely something to do with the sacrificial actions that took place there.

If sacrifice is the context of prayer, then once again we might note that it is the character of God revealed in these sacrifices that is of utmost importance. When Nehemiah (Neh 9) leads the people of Israel in a prayer of corporate confession, he recounts how God has saved them in the past despite their sin and rebellion and ascribes graciousness to him (v. 17), consciously echoing the words God has declared about himself in Exodus 34:6. Nehemiah knows that at this critical moment when Israel returns to Jerusalem a knowledge of God's grace will be vitally important for the people. They must be taught to remember who they are in light of what God has done for them so they can understand the significance of their actions. Nehemiah does not speak to their immediate needs; he points them back to God's great historic dealings with his people, calling them to recall how God has revealed himself to be merciful and faithful to them in the past. Nehemiah calls both the people and God himself in his prayer, asking God to be the God he has promised to be and reminding the people of who they are. And of course he is engaged in the great project of rebuilding the temple, the very place where the sacrifices that undergird prayer are to be performed.

The existential impact of grace is nowhere more apparent than in the Psalms. When we turn to these, we find them replete with references to God's graciousness as well as explicit calls for him to be gracious. Indeed, the grace of God serves as the foundation for the piety of the psalmist. It is God's grace alone that forms the basis for any salvific engagement with him. In Psalm 4 he calls on God to be gracious by hearing his prayer (v. 1). Psalm 6 asks the Lord to be gracious by not rebuking the psalmist in wrath (v. 1). Psalm 9 calls on the Lord to be

gracious by saving him from persecution at the hands of his enemies (v. 13). At times, the suffering of the psalmist leads him to question whether God is still gracious (Ps 77:9), while at other times his confidence overflows with exultant declarations of how gracious God is, echoing other declarations of God's gracious character found in Exodus 34:6 (Pss 103:8; 145:8) or the Aaronic blessing (Ps 67:1). As noted earlier, the covenant is also featured as the grounds for God's graciousness. Prayer typically takes the form of calling out to God and asking him to be the gracious God he has promised to be. The psalmist does not look to his own merit but rather the character of God as he has displayed it in his dealings with his people.

What is clear from a study of prayer in the Psalms is that God's grace, his unmerited mercy in his dealings with his people, is foundational to the relationship between human beings and their Creator. Prayer is not a conversation between equals, nor is it a cooperative exercise between a servant and a king. The piety of the Psalms is decidedly one-sided, rooted in God's character and in God's response to human sin. The psalmist pleads no merit of his own but looks solely to God's grace in making his requests. As we move into the New Testament, we see this grace embodied and definitively revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet even in the piety of the Old Testament we see the people turning to the grace of God. To live in the favor and grace of God has been the perennial longing of the people of God from the very start. The psalmist knows that the only answer to the deepest and most troubling questions of human existence is the grace of God.

In fact, at the heart of biblical piety as established in the Old Testament lies a cry of human desperation. The psalmists recognize that there is hope, but it is only found in God's gracious initiative. They have despaired of themselves and see no hope in a fallen creation. They know that if salvation is to come, it can only come from God himself and can only be rooted in his character and his actions. The reason is simple: human beings are in rebellion against God. The creation groans under the weight of human sin and the disruption in our relationship with our Creator. Human experience is tragic: life is not as it should be and ends in death, the penalty for sin. Death is an unnatural intrusion into the realm of human existence, and hope, if there is any hope, must

be in God himself breaking into this creation from outside and acting toward it in mercy.

This is why, even in the darkest of the psalms (Ps 88) where there is no explicit expression of hope at all, the psalmist uses the covenant name of God. Despair is set against the larger background of God's covenant and his grace. The problem of humanity is not lack of self-fulfillment requiring personal affirmation and assistance. It is that we are rebels against God at the very core of our being and need him to be gracious toward us.

I would note at this point that this understanding is quite different from what we often find today, even among Protestant churches that claim to take the Bible and the Reformation seriously. Under the impact of cultural forces that place the consumer at the center, Christianity has become a means to an end, something that helps us to realize our own goals or potential. It is a kind of self-help therapy dressed up in an orthodox religious idiom. Yet this has nothing in common with biblical piety, a grace-based piety that understands the tragedy of the human condition and knows that only God's unmerited favor can solve the problems of the human condition.

This is further evident in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. Earlier, we noted Jonah's complaint about God's grace, knowing that Nineveh deserved destruction but "worried" that God might prefer mercy to justice. Jonah relished grace for himself but was not eager to share it with others. More positively, Joel speaks of God's grace in calling the people back to repentance (Joel 2:13), as do Amos (Amos 5:15) and Malachi (Mal 1:9). Of all the prophets, however, Isaiah is arguably the greatest prophet of God's grace. Beginning with his own crisis moment in Isaiah 6, when he is confronted by the Lord in his holiness, Isaiah is driven to despair because of his own sin, a despair cured only by God's own merciful and gracious action. This awareness of God's grace carries through his writings, into the magnificent Servant Songs, where Isaiah looks to the grace of God as the ultimate hope for the people's salvation.

Isaiah 53:4–6 famously offers a pointed and powerful statement of this grace:

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Here we see the culmination of God's gracious action focused on the Servant. Our griefs and our sorrows have been borne by him. Our peace is bought as he is crushed and chastised. Our sins and transgressions have been laid on him by the Lord so that we might not have to bear their consequences ourselves. God is the agent in this work on our behalf. It is not a response to any good actions we have performed. Rather, it is the opposite: this is how God responds to our sinful rebellion. God's graciousness finds fulfillment in the work of the Servant. Here God's unmerited salvific favor is enacted and displayed for all to see. Isaiah's prophecies of the Servant and his gracious activity point us forward, to the fullness of God's grace revealed in Christ in the New Testament.

## Grace in the New Testament

#### Grace and Jesus Christ

The supreme manifestation of God's grace in history is Jesus Christ. All of the elements of grace we have discussed in the Old Testament covenant, sacrifice, prayer—find their culmination in the incarnation and life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In him God not only breaks into history in human form but also brings to a startling climax his promised purposes for his people.

Numerous New Testament passages show Christ as the fulfillment of God's Old Testament plan. The genealogy in Matthew 1 reveals that Jesus stands in the human line of Abraham and David, immediately rooting his significance in God's previous covenantal dealings with the

Jewish people. Luke's genealogy (Luke 3) goes further, taking us all the way back to Adam. Right after the genealogy, we see Christ tempted like Adam. This time, as the second Adam, he is tried in the wilderness and successfully resists the temptation. In connecting Jesus to the first man and in the recapitulation of his action, Luke connects the Gospel narratives to the argument of Paul in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 where Adam and Christ are presented as the two archetypal human beings, counterpoints to each other. Christ's significance—our understanding of who he is and what he has done—is tied to Adam. Jesus represents the action of God in history in response to the failure of Adam.

Reformed theology has typically expressed this relationship in terms of covenants. As Adam was the covenant head of humanity under terms set by God in the garden of Eden before the fall, so Christ comes as the second Adam, the head of a new covenant, to bring his people back into full communion with God. Neither is merely a private individual, living and acting for himself. Both are representative in a way analogous to that in which a head of state represents the whole nation in a single person. Thus, as Adam is the source of the problem, so Christ is the solution.

Old Testament references and allusions permeate the descriptions of Christ in the Gospels. We cannot note them all, but even a cursory reading will show that Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic prophecies (Luke 4:18-22), of Ezekiel 34 (Mark 6:30-44, esp. 34), the fulfillment of that for which Abraham was looking (John 8:56), and the one in whom Isaiah's own prophetic commission finds its culmination (Mark 4:11–12; cf. Isa 6:9–10). The references to the Old Testament continue in the New Testament letters, as Hebrews 1 makes it clear that Christ is the final, full, and definitive revelation of all of that which the earlier prophets spoke. Peter, in his letters, makes it clear that Christ's suffering was predicted by the Old Testament prophets (1 Pet 1:10–12). And Luke's Gospel tells us that Christ himself showed the disciples on the road to Emmaus how to read the Scriptures in light of him. Jesus showed them that he was prophesied in the Old Testament and even scolds them for being foolish and slow of heart to not see it (Luke 24:25-26).

Yet this fulfillment of the Old Testament was no easy thing. As

mysterious as it is and as reverent as we must be in discussing it, it is clear from the Gospel narratives that Christ underwent huge mental and physical trials as he went about his ministry in Galilee and as he made his way inexorably to the cross. To borrow that distinction from Bonhoeffer, this is no cheap grace. Christ purchased this grace at a cost to which we cannot attach a price but at which we can only marvel in terrified awe.

In this context, we should note that Christ also fulfills the Old Testament connection between sacrifice and prayer. The Letter to the Hebrews is an extended reflection on the nature and significance of his status as the great high priest, and at the center of that role, as with the priests of the Old Testament, are the inseparable actions of sacrifice and intercession. The difference between Christ and the Old Testament priests and sacrifices is that Christ is both sacrificer and sacrifice, both the foundation for intercession and the one who intercedes. This is, to borrow from Newton's well-known hymn, amazing grace: that God himself in the person of the Son would take flesh, become priest, and sacrifice himself as victim on our behalf.

#### Hebrews 4:14–16 elaborates on this as follows:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

If we are ever tempted to think of grace in abstract terms, then this passage, rather like the passages on sacrifice in the Old Testament, should cure us of such. The grace of God here is not simply the fact that God set forth his own Son to be a sacrifice, if that were not in itself amazing enough. It is that the incarnate Son even now continues to intercede for us on the basis of his sacrifice and does so in a manner that takes full account of his human nature and of his incarnate life. God is terrifying and awesome in his absolute holiness; yet because of his grace manifest in Christ, we are urged to approach him with confidence.

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The grace of God in Christ incarnate is the cure for all diffidence and timidity in prayer.

Jesus fulfills the covenant promises, and he is the final, perfect sacrifice for sin. He is the grace of God embodied, the one to whom our pious prayers are directed as he intercedes on our behalf. From the numerous benedictions offered in the letters of Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:14) to the revelation of the incarnation and the work of God through the person of Jesus in the Gospels, we encounter the climactic culmination of God's work of grace in the New Testament. If grace is the unmerited favor of God, then the advent of the Son of God in human flesh is the greatest act of God's grace and the fulfillment of God's gracious purpose.

## Grace and the New Creation

So powerful and so remarkable is the coming of the Christ that it does not simply involve the fulfillment of the Old Testament but also in a sense represents a new beginning, something discontinuous with the past. In the Gospel narratives, this is obvious in the announcement of the virgin birth. Yes, this is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isa 7:14), but it is also something in which the grace of God was especially evident in a manner that involved a break with the past. A virginal conception is a unilateral and miraculous act of the sovereign God. There is no human means of accomplishing such a thing. It represents a break with the natural order of things. God must intervene in human history to accomplish it, and he does so in a manner that emphasizes his grace. The ESV translates Luke 1:28: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But you could just as accurately say "Greetings, one to whom the Lord has shown kindness/grace." The conception of Mary's son is connected to God's decision to make her a special object of his grace.

This in-breaking of grace in the coming of the Christ is of such a miraculous and powerful kind that it finds an analogue only in the act of creation itself. God creates Christ in the Virgin's womb in a manner akin to the way he created Adam from the dust of the earth. Virginal conception is a gracious conception, and the parallel between God's work in Christ and his work in the first creation is crucial to the New Testament.

This analogy between the grace of both creation and redemption is developed by Paul in his description of Christ in Colossians 1:15–20:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Here Paul is not, as the Arians would argue, making Christ the greatest of the creatures in creation. He is speaking of Christ as the *agent* of creation and the one in whom the whole created world finds its unity and coherence. This role in creation is parallel with his role in the new creation, in which Christ is the head of the church and the firstborn among those who rise from the dead.

"Firstborn" is not a statement of chronological priority. In the Old Testament, the term is often used to describe preeminence. Israel is described by the Lord as his "firstborn" in Exodus 4:22, and Psalm 89:27 speaks of the Messiah as being made "my firstborn" to mean that he will be given supreme authority. When Christ is called firstborn by Paul, whether of creation (Col 1:15) or from the dead (Col 1:18), Paul is speaking of Christ's preeminence in both the original founding of the old creation and in the in-breaking of the new.

Indeed, Christ is not simply the first to rise from the dead chronologically (which would be untrue); he is the prototype for all of those who rise from the dead. In him the fullness of God dwells, and he reconciles all things to himself. The incarnation represents the unilateral gracious action of God in the new creation, just as Genesis 1 and 2 describe the old creation as the sovereign, unilateral act of God.

Titus 2:11 declares that "the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people." The incarnation is the embodiment of God's

#### For Mark, Jen, and Alicia



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ISBN 978-0-310-51576-0

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Cover design: Chris Tobias/Outerwear for Books Interior design: Denise Froehlich

Printed in the United States of America

Trueman takes complex biblical and theological ideas and makes them easy to understand. The key message is that God's grace, healing our sinful neediness, is at the heart of true biblical piety. Trueman develops this theme with relation to the church, preaching, sacraments, and prayer. As a Catholic, I resonated deeply with Trueman's portrait of biblical piety, and I found much else to treasure—including his emphasis on the priority of God's action and his stirring account of the ministry of preaching. This is a book that will instruct everyone who loves the gracious Lord Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW LEVERING, James N. and Mary D. Perry Jr. Chair of Theology, Mundelein Seminary

Grace is a word so common in our day and age as to border on the cliché. Yet prizing the gospel means treasuring grace. Carl Trueman does us all the service, then, of helping to make connections that are crucial: between grace and the active presence of the triune God, between the promises of the Old Testament and the intervention recounted in the New, between the ancient faith of the early fathers and later Protestant reforms, and between a rich theology of grace and its necessary implications for piety and worship. This book brings remarkable biblical, historical, and pastoral perspective to an oftentimes ambiguous but genuinely amazing reality.

MICHAEL ALLEN, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida

This is an outstanding book on an extraordinary subject. It clearly explains the biblical foundations of grace and navigates the historical debates in a way that is both highly engaging and deeply informed. Perhaps even more importantly, the practical applications of grace—both for individuals and for churches—are sharply driven home. I am grateful this book was written, and I highly commend it to any and all who are interested in learning more about the matchless grace of the triune God.

JONATHAN L. MASTER, Professor of Theology and Dean of the School of Divinity, Cairn University Trueman, a master of the art of making historical texts of the Christian tradition relevant and applicable for use in our time, effectively presents the ways in which Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin put the foundational biblical concept of grace to work in their day. This serves him well as a basis for a lively exploration of how God's grace functions in the church today through the proclaimed Word of God, the sacraments, and believers' prayer. This volume demonstrates how grace, as the lively disposition of God in Christ, frames God's dealing with a sinful world as Trueman confesses its significance for the twenty-first century.

ROBERT KOLB, Professor of Systematic Theology emeritus, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis

Where is grace? What is grace? Who is grace? And how is it conferred to us? I resonate with Trueman's lament that grace has become an empty sentiment in much of contemporary Christian literature. What does the Reformation cry "grace alone" really mean? And why is it so important today? To answer these questions, Trueman gives us both a history and a theology of grace. He shows the reader that grace is confrontational, that one can't have a proper understanding of grace without a proper understanding of sin. Read this book to learn what a grace-alone church takes seriously.

AIMEE BYRD, author of *No Little Women*, *Theological Fitness*, and *Housewife Theologian*; Director of Women's Initiatives at The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and cohost on Mortification of Spin podcast.

Carl Trueman is always worth reading. I am especially eager to recommend this excellent volume on the Protestant battle cry "grace alone." It is obvious that it comes from one who is both a scholar and a churchman. It at once challenges the mind and warms the heart with the grand theme of God's gracious salvation. This is a book to be savored.

TODD PRUITT, pastor, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia

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