

## Part Five: The End of *Soli Deo Gloria* —"Glory to God Alone"

Peter Ditzel

---

*Soli Deo Gloria*, "Glory to God Alone," was one of the Five Solas of the Reformation. They were: 1. *Sola Scriptura*—"By Scripture Alone," 2. *Sola fide*—"by faith alone," 3. *Sola gratia*—"by grace alone," 4. *Solus Christus* or *Solo Christo*—"Christ alone" or "through Christ alone," and 5. *Soli Deo Gloria*—"glory to God alone." The Reformers specified these Five Solas as central, biblical truths that contrast with the corrupt doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, but today, Protestant and Evangelical churches forsake them with little thought. In this article, we will see the significance of "Glory to God Alone" as taught in the Bible, look at how Catholic dogma contradicts this, briefly point out the many ways Protestant and Evangelical churches have abandoned *soli Deo gloria*, and conclude this series of articles with a question posed by our Lord.

---

Few who call themselves Christian would deny that God is worthy of glory. Most would even agree that God is due all glory, as long as they can add some qualifications to that. But when we say that *soli Deo gloria*, or "glory to God alone," means that all glory for every aspect of man's salvation is God's alone to the exclusion of man's works, we will find much less agreement. Yet, as I will point out in this article, this is what the Bible teaches. There are also many popular preachers who might, if asked, say they agree with the definition of *soli Deo gloria*, but who promote human-centered, human-glorifying gospels.

Sometimes Catholics set up a straw man by saying that Protestants teach *soli Deo gloria* to mean that no human can ever be glorified for any reason. They then knock the straw man down by quoting Scriptures that speak of God glorifying men. It's true, of course, that the Bible does in many places speak of God glorifying His saints. Romans 8:30 even speaks of our glorification as an accomplished fact. The truth is that *soli Deo gloria* does not mean that no one can share in God's glory. Glory to God alone means that God did all of the work and is due all of the glory; He is the only one deserving of glory. We have not earned the glory He gives us. We do not merit it. It is God's gracious gift that He gives us because we are in His Son, not because we have earned it.

One reason "glory to God alone" is so important lies in its foundational position. If we allow any glory for man's salvation to go to Mary or to the "saints" or to a priest or to ourselves, we logically imply that human works are at least partly responsible for salvation. This makes humans co-saviors with Christ.

### ***Soli Deo Gloria in the Bible***

There are so many Scriptures that maintain this doctrine that I will simply choose a few to make my point. Here is one that is eminently clear: "If anyone speaks, let it be as it were the very words of God. If anyone serves, let it be as of the strength which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:11). Notice that this verse implies that our works do not glorify us, but they glorify God through Jesus Christ (who, of course, is God) who rightfully has the glory forever.

Romans 11:35-36 tell us that God owes no one anything—which, of course, includes glory, and God has the glory forever: "Or who has first given to him, and it will be repaid to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen." Paul also writes, "Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Galatians 1:3-5). Notice the connection between God's will that Christ give Himself for our sins and God having the glory forever. In 1 Timothy 1:17, Paul again writes, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Peter explains the relationship between God's eternal glory and the glory that humans may have: "But may the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:10-11). By Jesus Christ—because of what He has done for us—God calls us to His eternal glory, to share in it, but Peter is careful to point out that the glory is forever God's.

God's glory is inherent, yet, as the God-Man, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God also became worthy to receive glory: "'Worthy is the Lamb who has been killed to receive the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor,

glory, and blessing!' I heard every created thing which is in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be the blessing, the honor, the glory, and the dominion, forever and ever! Amen!'" (Revelation 5:12-13). As Jesus said in His prayer to the Father before His crucifixion, "Now, Father, glorify me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5).

### **The Catholic Teaching**

In the following quotes, notice the link between the Catholic teaching of being justified by one's own good works and meriting glory. From the Council of Trent (held between 1545 and 1563), we read:

If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that they are not also the good merits of him justified; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.

Canon 32

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), often called Vatican II, stated, "When a Catholic does a good work, the Church teaches that he immediately receives the reward of an increase of grace. This grace further justifies the Catholic. He becomes holier and more pleasing to God. This is the first kind of merited reward in Catholicism."

Clearly, the Catholic teaching is that—instead of the completed work of Jesus Christ alone earning for us grace, justification, sanctification, and glorification—our works earn us grace, justification, holiness, and glory. Now compare this with how the Bible continually gives all credit for our salvation, our justification, and our reconciliation to Jesus Christ alone:

But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we will be saved by his life.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.... For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; so much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life. For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.

Romans 5: 8-11, 17-19

The Catholic teaching of many men earning grace, justification, and so forth scatters to the wind the direct link the Bible teaches between the one man's—Adam's—sin bringing death and condemnation to those he represented and the one man's—Jesus Christ's—one act of righteousness bringing justification, righteousness, and life to those He represented.

Let me give you another quote stating the Catholic position. According to Catholic theologian Dr. Ludwig Ott, "A just man merits for himself through each good work an increase of sanctifying grace, eternal life (if he dies in a state of grace) and an increase of heavenly glory" (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* [Fort Collins, CO: Roman Catholic Books, 1954] 267). This is not, "glory to God alone." It is "glory to many men earned by their works."

The fact that Catholic Church dogma contradicts the biblical teaching of "glory to God alone" can be seen in another little twist devised by Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). In his *Summa Theologica* (II-II, Q. 132, Art. 1), he taught that it is not wrong for a man to seek to glorify himself before others. He then supports his claim with this partial Scripture quote: "Let your light shine before men." Unfortunately for Thomas, the full quote proves just the opposite: "Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). We are not to let our light shine before men so they may glorify us, but so they may glorify God. The Bible teaching is that the glory always goes to God, who may then graciously share it with those who have not earned it.

### **Modern Peddlers of Man's Glory**

Today there are churches, ministries, writers, and radio and television evangelists who claim to be the heirs of the Protestant Reformation but, using one twisted doctrine or another, teach man's work in salvation. Some say that we are not justified until God judges our works on the last day and He glorifies or condemns us based on those works. Others teach that we are justified by faith plus "works of faith." Others talk about justification by "active faith" (a euphemism for works). Another prominent minister speaks of a "future grace" that God grants only to those who are obedient to the covenant. Others say that we are justified by faith alone but sanctified by our works. In every case, then, we work for at least some of our salvation and, thus, earn glory. All of the glory does not go to God alone. Man also merits some glory. The purveyors of these messages are deceitful workers. Compare what you hear from them to the Bible. Ephesians 1:3-12 is a good place to start:

Ephesians 1:3-12	Commentary
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ;	We do not bless ourselves; every spiritual blessing comes from God.
even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love; having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, to the praise of the glory of his grace,	God chose us, God predestinated us, according to His good pleasure, to <i>His</i> glorious grace, <i>not ours</i> .
by which he freely bestowed favor on us in the Beloved, in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,	Notice the emphasis on "the Beloved" (Christ). Our redemption is through His blood according to grace. We earn none of it and merit no glory.
which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,	We receive our inheritance according to God's purpose who

<p>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in him; in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will; to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ:</p>	<p>worked all things according to His will. The end or purpose is not that we should merit glory but that we should be to the praise of His glory; that is, that our salvation glorifies God.</p>
--	---

Let's not be deluded by the beguiling arguments of those who promote a works salvation that steals the glory from God. We must also turn from the man-glorifying messages of the health and wealth gospel, the feel-good charismatic preachers, and the megachurches—or any churches—that venerate their leaders. Those who take away from God's glory and give it to man "are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as Christ's apostles. And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

*"The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever, and throw their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy are you, our Lord and God, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, for you created all things, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!'"*

Revelation 4:10-11

### **The Conclusion to this Series of Articles**

What I have tried to point out in these five articles is that, since the time of the Reformation, the Protestant defense of the Five Solas has been crumbling. In fact, the Magisterial Reformers never really took *sola scriptura* seriously because it—as well as the priesthood of all believers—was incompatible with their desire for a distinction between "clergy" and "laity" (see <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/endofreformation.htm>).

They wanted a clergy-ruled church, one in which only this special class of functionaries would interpret Scripture and formulate dogma, and they wanted the state to use its power of the sword to repress anyone who dared interpret Scripture for himself. Much of the blood of the souls under the altar (Revelation 6:9-11) was shed under the wolfish demands of fleece-robed Protestant churches. And while the churches eventually lost their whip hand over the state, they never lost their love for clergy domination. Partly, perhaps, because of that parochial control, insulated by its very nature from legitimate accountability to the authority that could hold them to the truth—*sola scriptura*, the centuries have seen them lose the Five Solas and many other truths.

So we are left with a wreck; like the temple in Jerusalem, there is not left one stone upon another (I'm not saying that the Protestant churches ever were the real temple of God, which is the *ekklēsia*, the Body of Christ composed of His saints). There was more hope for the Radical Reformers who tried to truly uphold *sola scriptura*, the priesthood of all believers, and the separation of church and state. These Christians, from whom the Anabaptists (Mennonites and Amish), Baptists, and Quakers trace their roots, met in small, *ekklēsia*-type assemblies and scorned church buildings, calling them piles of stone.

But their distinction from Protestantism didn't last. Apparently, the pressure to be more like the established churches was too much. In America, for example, "First Quakers and Mennonites held meeting together in their homes. By 1690, however, the two groups split due to a conflict of interests. The Mennonites wanted a minister, and the Quakers did not. William Rittenhouse, known as the first paper maker in the colonies, was the first Mennonite minister in America. In 1708 the Mennonites built 'a little log church,' their first meetinghouse in America. Here meetings were held and school was taught by Minister Christopher Dock" (<http://www.ushistory.org/germantown/upper/mennonite.htm>). Walk into a Mennonite church building today, and you will find pews and a pulpit from which the minister preaches, trappings of the clergy-laity distinction that stems directly from Catholicism. Quakers have wandered from the truth in a different way. Believing in continuing revelation, they have strayed from *sola scriptura*.

Should we look for the Protestant churches to revive the Reformation? Should we hope for them to again take up the torch of the Five Solas? I neither see an indication that this will happen nor any reason to believe that, even if it did, it would be any more enduring or successful

in the long run that the original Reformation. The Protestant churches never fell far enough away from the tree that spawned them.

Paul warned, "For the time will come when they will not listen to the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will heap up for themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). That time has come. If any people are going to uphold the truth, it must be we who understand our obligation, not to an institutional church or to a man or to a man-made creed, but to God and His gracious Word. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23).

In Revelation, Jesus said, "Hold that which you have firmly until I come" (2:25), and, "Hold firmly that which you have, so that no one takes your crown" (3:11). Yet, Jesus also asked, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find [the] faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). I pray the answer is yes.