

“Reformation Realities”

Selected Texts

Q - What is the significance of the term “Protestant” which is commonly used to refer to the non-catholic elements of Christianity?

The “Protestant Reformation” is commonly traced back to the life and actions of Martin Luther who, though not the only player, was a major factor. Walter Elwell has described it (in his Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, p. 919) as “a wide-ranging movement of religious renewal in Europe concentrated in the sixteenth century.” The “reformers” subscribed collectively to several important truths known as the “Five solae” (five Latin phrases that emerged during the Reformation and that summarize the Reformers’ basic theological beliefs - held in contradistinction to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church of their day).

I. Sola Scriptura (“by Scripture alone”)

“Sola Scriptura” is the teaching that the Bible is the only inspired and authoritative word of God - the only source for Christian doctrine - accessible to all in the sense that it is understandable and self-interpreting.

[That the Bible requires no interpretation outside of itself is in direct opposition to the teaching of the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglo-Catholic, and Roman Catholic traditions, which teach that the Bible can be authentically interpreted only by apostolic or sacred Tradition.]

Q - How does II Timothy 3:16 affirm the assertion that the Scriptures are deserving of the Christian’s trust? It says that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

Q - What did Peter identify as the “imperishable seed” by which his readers were “born again” in I Peter 1:23? “The living and enduring word of God,”

Q - What was Peter’s response in Acts 5:29 to the thought that the disciples should submit to the orders of the religious leaders of their nation? Peter and the apostles said “We must

obey God rather than men.”

II. Sola Fide (“by faith alone”)

“Sola Fide” is the teaching that justification (interpreted in Protestant theology as “being declared just by God”) is received by faith only, without any mixture of or need for good works - though in classical Protestant theology, saving faith is always evidenced, but not determined, by good works.

[Some Protestants see this doctrine as being summarized with the formula “Faith yields justification and good works” and as contrasted with the Roman Catholic formula “Faith and good works yield justification.” In Catholic theology righteous works are considered meritorious toward salvation in addition to faith; whereas in Protestant theology righteous works are seen as the result and evidence of a truly justified and regenerate believer who has received these by faith alone.]

Q - What does Romans 3:20 assure us will not result in justification before the Lord? “No flesh will be justified in God’s sight by the works of the law.”

Q - To whom does Romans 3:26 say the Lord grants justification? “It says that God is “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Q - What part do the “works of the law” play in the justification of the man who has faith according to Romans 3:28? No part! “A man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

Q - What does Romans 4:5 say is credited to the person who does not work his own righteousness but who does place faith in the Lord? “His faith is credited as righteousness.”

III. Sola Gratia (“by grace alone”)

“Sola Gratia” is the teaching that salvation comes by divine grace or “unmerited favor” only, not as something merited by the sinner.

[While both Catholics and Protestants believe that grace is truly and always a gift of God, Catholics believe that man, acting under the influence of grace, can cooperate with grace to

“merit” greater graces for himself. “Works righteousness” is a term some have applied to this belief. Some Protestants, on the other hand, believe that God acts alone to save the sinner - that God’s grace is “irresistible.” Other Protestants (often described as Arminians) believe that God saves only by grace and not at all by merit, but that man (enabled by what is referred to as “prevenient grace”) is enabled by the Holy Spirit to understand the Gospel and respond in faith.]

Q - What did Peter tell the Jerusalem Council it was that saved Jews just as it did Gentiles in Acts 15:11? He said “We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Q - How does Romans 3:24 tell us the Lord has provided the gift of justification? “As a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

Q - How did Paul, in Ephesians 2:5, say a person once dead in transgressions can be made alive with Christ? “By grace you have been saved.”

Q - What did Paul combine with grace in the experience of the person who has been saved in Ephesians 2:8,9? “By grace you have been saved through faith.”

IV. Solus Christus or Solo Christo (“Christ alone” or “through Christ alone”)

“Solo Christo” is the teaching that Christ is the only mediator between God and man, and that there is salvation through no one other than Christ.

[Catholicism confuses the matter by interjecting the priesthood between God and the sinner. For example, Catholicism’s understanding of the words of Jesus regarding the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19), with the authority of the Pope and the priest to “bind” and to “loose” clouds the importance of Christ as the only mediator between God and man. In Catholic theology, the means by which justification is applied to the soul is the sacrament of baptism - which is administered by the priest. And the interjection of the priesthood between God and the sinner when it comes to the confession of sins calls into question the role of Christ as the believer’s High Priest.]

Q - How is Jesus described in I Timothy 2:5? “The “one mediator between God and men.”

Q - What was Christ’s warning to those who hope to go to God some other way than Himself in John 14:6? “No one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Q - What did Peter say, in Acts 4:12, is the only avenue of salvation under heaven for those who seek salvation from sin? “There is salvation in no one else, “for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

V. Sola Deo Gloria (“glory to God alone”)

“Sola Deo Gloria” is the teaching that all glory for man’s salvation is due to God alone, since salvation is accomplished solely through His will and action.

[Catholicism clouds the issue by elevating Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, and the “saints” to places of honor and ministry which are not supported in the pages of Scripture.]

Q - What does Galatians 1:3-4 tell us God did for which He deserves the glory attributed to Him in verse 5? God in Christ “gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age.”

Q - When does Ephesians 1:4 reveal it was that God chose to make “holy and blameless” the objects of His salvation plan? “Before the foundation of the world.”

Q - To what did the apostle Paul ascribe the believer’s salvation in Titus 3:5? God saves us by “the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

Q - What did the apostle Paul ascribe to “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God” in I Timothy 1:17? “Honor and glory forever and ever.”

Q - What did the apostle John hear myriads of angels and the living creatures and the elders in heaven attributing to the Lamb that was slain in Revelation 5:11-12? “Power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

Think About It: Protestant reformers sought to replace doctrinal error in their day with Biblical truth about God the Father and the Son, about the Scriptures, and about the role of faith and grace in the salvation of souls.

Apply It: Are you trusting by faith for the eternal salvation of your soul only the grace of God dispensed by Jesus Christ as revealed in the pages of the Scriptures for the glory of God?