

Baptisms / Soli Deo Gloria
Selected Scriptures
ABC 11/5/17

As we come to the conclusion of our series on the *solas* of the Reformation, we come to *Soli Deo Gloria*, glory to God alone. But before we do that, we get to see God be glorified today by two of His children obeying Him in baptism. This led me to try to figure out just what Martin Luther believed about baptism. As you know, Lutherans today baptize infants, which seems to compromise the fact that justification is by faith alone, *Sola Fide*. An infant doesn't have the ability to understand the gospel or to place its faith in Jesus. On top of that, if Scripture is our only ultimate authority, & it says nothing about the baptism of babies, do we truly trust Scripture? Let me read a few quotes from Luther & see if you can figure out his position on baptism:

Baptism is nothing else than water & the Word of God in & with each other, that is, when the Word is added to the water, Baptism is valid, even though faith be wanting. For my faith does not make Baptism, but receives it. Now, Baptism does not become invalid even though it be wrongly received or employed; since it is not bound (as stated) to our faith, but to the Word.¹

That the Baptism of infants is pleasing to Christ is sufficiently proved from His own work, namely, that God sanctifies many of them who have been thus baptized.²

A man may believe even though he is not baptized. For Baptism is no more than an outward sign to admonish us concerning the divine promise. If one can have it, is good to take it, for no one should despise it. If one cannot have it, or is refused it, he is not damned if only he believes the Gospel.³

Needless to say, Luther's view of baptism was fluid & changing. This is why Scripture is our authority & not any man or church, except as given in God's Word. & the truth of the matter is that no one this side of eternity is fully sound or completely consistent in doctrine or practice, including Luther, the other Reformers, or any pastor, including me. As hard as Luther tried, he failed to cut every rope the Roman Catholic sacramental system had used to bind Christians. With all that being said, what does the Bible itself teach about baptism?

Baptism is a public symbol of faith in God. Peter said it's a mark of salvation because it gives outward evidence of an inward faith in Christ (1 Pt 3:21). Those being baptized today are

¹ *Larger Catechism*, part 4, *Of Baptism*

² *Ibid*, *Of Infant Baptism*

³ Preached by Luther in 1522; quoted by Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian Life*, 4:155

declaring by their baptisms that the Lord Jesus Christ, who has died, was buried, has been raised from the dead, & is now seated at the right hand of God, is their Savior. Baptism is like a precious jewel. Set apart by itself, it's pleasant & appealing but has nothing within it to really compel. But place baptism against the backdrop of our sin & turn on the light of the cross, & the jewel explodes with significance. Baptism reveals the beauty of the cross & the darkness of our sin. As a diamond has many faces, baptism has many sides: cleansing, burial, resurrection, the death of the old, & the birth of the new. & as a stone has no light within it, baptism has no inherent power. Baptism does not save or forgive sins. But it reveals the many colors of God's grace. In its essence, baptism is a...

1. Symbol of a Union Baptism symbolizes the connection we have with Jesus, a picture of the reuniting of sinner & Savior. To understand & celebrate the connection we share with Jesus, let's go back a couple thousand years to the muddy shores of the Jordan River. The Bible says:

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, I have need to be baptized by You, & do You come to me? But Jesus answering said to him, *Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.* Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; & behold, the heavens were opened, & he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove & lighting on Him, & behold, a voice out of the heavens said, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased* (Mt 3:13-17).

It was onto this ordinary stage that the Son of God stepped, wading into the muddy Jordan River. It's easy to understand why John was hesitant to baptize Jesus. After all, John had been preaching a baptism of repentance, & Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God. But Jesus insisted. You see, as Jesus descended into the water, He was coming down to our level. He was identifying with sinners. Baptism was for the immoral, the impure, the liars, the hot-heads, & the hypocrites, & yet Jesus willingly plunged into the water as if to say, *I'm with them!* Jesus came to be baptized because we are sinners. He was washed because we weren't clean. He did what was right because we do what's wrong. He became like us so we could become like Him. When we're baptized, it's as if we're joining Jesus in the water. The Bible even says we are joined with Christ Jesus in baptism (Rom 6:3). Just as a wedding celebrates the fusion of 2 hearts, baptism

celebrates the joining together of sinner & Savior. Turn the stone so the light hits from another angle, though, & baptism becomes a...

2. Symbol of Repentance The Bible says John went into all the country around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** (Lk 3:3). Peter repeated a similar sentiment on the day of Pentecost, saying, **Repent & be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins** (Acts 2:38). So both John's baptism & Christian baptism were signs of repentance. Repentance isn't just some religious word. It simply means to turn. Ezekiel explained what God wants His people to turn from: **Repent & turn away from...all your abominable sins** (Ez 14:6). Isaiah tells us what God wants us to turn toward: **Turn to Me & be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, & there is no other** (Is 45:22). All through the Bible, God pleads with people to turn from their sins & to turn toward Him, trusting in Him alone to save. Baptism is a sign you've done this. Refract the light of the cross from yet another angle, & baptism becomes a...

3. Symbol of Resurrection The Jews saw baptism as a method of maintaining ritual purification for priests or as a rite of passage for converts. John the Baptist preached baptism with repentance. But Jesus would add a whole new dimension to baptism, as it came to be a living picture of the death, burial, & resurrection of Christ. This is what the Bible says:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4).

Just as the waters of baptism provided Jesus with a way to identify with us, they also provide us with a way to identify with Him. Baptism paints a vivid picture of our Christian faith. The plunge beneath the water is like a death; submerging into the water is like a burial; then rising up from the water is a symbol of resurrection. The Bible also says, **having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead** (Col 2:12). Baptism without personal faith in Jesus means nothing, but baptism as an act of faith is full of meaning & significance. Not only does it signify our union with Jesus, our repentance from sin, & our resurrection with Christ, but it's also a...

4. Symbol of Rebirth The Bible says,

But when the kindness of God our Savior & His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration & renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7).

The **washing of regeneration** or rebirth doesn't refer to water baptism itself; rather, it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit who regenerates & renews our souls. But the invisible work of the Spirit is visibly seen in the waters of baptism. Baptism symbolizes our spiritual birth into God's family. During His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said,

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, & that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes & you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from & where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit (Jn 3:6-8).

The Holy Spirit is invisible; & when a person is born again of the Spirit, you can't see or hear it, but baptism is the visible reflection of our invisible birth. When Jesus said, **You must be born again**, Nicodemus saw only complications & impossibilities. But, as Jesus would later say, **With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God (Mk 10:27)**. The only way a person can really start over in life is by being born from above, born again by receiving God's life-giving Spirit. Baptism is a willing plunge into the promise & power of Jesus Christ. It embodies & represents our union with Him, our repentance of sin, our resurrection with Him, & our new birth into God's eternal family. If you have questions about baptism or would like to be baptized, please talk to me.

It's with great joy that I ask Chip, Jodi, & Elijah to come forward at this time.

Rom 10 tells us, **if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, & believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, & with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**

Do you believe that Jesus died in your place & took the punishment you deserved upon Himself?

Is your faith in Jesus alone for your salvation?

Having heard of your faith in Jesus, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit.

In just a little bit we'll remember what Jesus did for us on the cross through communion but we've just seen it pictured in baptism. If you haven't yet placed your faith in Jesus for the

forgiveness of your sins, His invitation is still open. **Come to Me, all who are weary & heavy-laden, & I will give you rest** (Mt 11:28). Jesus invites you to come to Him today. But like every invitation, you have to respond. You have to acknowledge your sin, turn from it, trust in Jesus by faith that it is His blood that covers you so that the wrath of God passes over you, that you would get a new heart, & a new life. As you do so, communion & baptism are for you. You can remember & rejoice in His broken body, shed blood, & glorious resurrection. Confess your sin & place your faith in Him alone for salvation.

Kent -- #460 *All the Way My Savior Leads Me* & we'll come back to look at *sola* #5, God's glory alone.

The Protestant Reformation was fundamentally a controversy with the Roman Catholic Church over how helpless we really are in our deadness & guilt. The Reformers believed that only God's grace could raise us from the dead, & only Christ could become our punishment & our perfection. These 2 miracles, of life from the dead & wrath removed, could only be received as a gift through faith. They could never be merited or earned, all so that the entire transaction would culminate *Soli Deo Gloria*, to the glory of God alone. Each of the prior 4 *solas* point to & are summed up by this 5th one. To put it another way, God's glory is the beginning & end of the other 4. The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures to the glory of God alone. Christ humbled Himself to the point of death & was raised & exalted to the right hand of the Father to the glory of God alone. Grace & mercy are offered to rebellious sinners to the glory of God alone. Justification by faith alone is to the glory of God alone. *Soli Deo Gloria*, therefore, is central. It's even been argued that the glory of God is the central theme in all the Scriptures. I often say it's all about Jesus, but it's certainly all about both. The Bible is a book about redemption through Jesus. But what's the purpose of our redemption? The glory of God. The Bible is a book of promises made & promises kept. But what is the result of all the promises? The glory of God.

1. What is the glory of God? It can be said that God's glory is His holiness on display. His glory is His infinite worth made known. Notice how Isaiah shifts from **holy** to **glory**: **Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory** (6:3). Because of His holiness the earth sees His glory. The basic meaning of **holy** is separated from the common. When you carry that definition all the way to the infinite separation of God from all that is common, the effect is to make Him the infinite *one-of-a-kind*, like the rarest & most perfect diamond in the world. From cover to cover, the great dominating reality of the Bible is that this infinitely valuable, completely pure, & beautiful divine uniqueness shines forth through creation & through all the acts of God in history & in redemption as the glory of God, that is, the outward radiance of the intrinsic worth & beauty & greatness of all His attributes.

Rom 11:33-36

This doxology comes at the end of the deep theological portion of Romans. Paul has explained our hopeless, sin-depraved condition & the wondrous rescuing work of Jesus. He's explained how Jesus' rejection by the Jews has led to the bringing in of Gentiles but that God still has a plan for His chosen people. When he gets to the end of all this, he doesn't glory in what he knows or is teaching. Instead, after he's explained all of this, he exalts God for how little he actually knows & understands about God & concludes, **to Him be the glory forever. Amen.** What is true of all things, that they are from God, through God, & to God, is also true of glory. Glory was God's in the beginning, is God's now, & shall be God's forever. Paul says it again in Rom 16:27, **to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.** Every attribute of God is a facet in the diamond that is the glory of God. If God lost any of His attributes, He'd be less glorious. Indeed, He wouldn't be God. So when we speak of the glory of God, we're not treating it as something God possesses, as if it's different from His own essence. No, God's glory is the radiance of the worth & beauty & greatness of God Himself to be spiritually seen & savored & shown by His redeemed people. Here's how Jonathan Edwards put it:

All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.... The refulgence shines upon & into the creature, & is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, & are something of God & are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, & in God, & to God, & God is the beginning, middle & end in this affair.

2. Why is the glory of God the goal of everything? God wanted it this way. This was His plan from eternity past. This was His purpose & design in all creation, all history, & all redemption. Before there was a sun, the Triune God dwelt in indescribable light. Before there was an earth on which to stand, the throne of God stood firm. If God chose to create anything at all, its conception & plans must have come from Him. When He set out to create, He didn't call for help of any kind. He didn't make use of any existing matter, for matter itself didn't yet exist. God created everything out of nothing. Creation is from God & through Him, but most importantly it is for His glory. In pondering why God created the world & mankind, Jonathan Edwards concluded it wasn't because He had any need or inadequacy in Himself. God can't be improved in any way. Only God's overflowing nature & delight in revelation of His nature could have caused it. Because of

who God is, God didn't merely wish to be all-powerful, holy, faithful, & true. God wanted to exhibit these qualities so He created the world to manifest His glory. God created, God sustains, God governs, & God saves in such a way as to reveal His glory. It all began with His purpose in creation: **The heavens declare the glory of God** (Ps 19:1). That's what they are for. This purpose extends to everything God does: **we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory** (Eph 1:11-12). & then Rom 11 again, **From Him & through Him & to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen** (36). Have you ever wondered why there's such a vastness of uninhabited galaxies & only one tiny dot of human existence? This universe isn't intended to portray the importance of man or even creation itself. God intends it all to give us some inkling of His own grandeur & majesty. & it's an understatement. The central story in all He does is the story of redemption. Paul tells us that all of it is **to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory** (Rom 9:23). Paul continues in Romans & says, **accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us, why? To the glory of God** (15:7). God planned all creation, all history, all redemption for His glory alone. Isaiah quotes God Himself saying, **I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images** (42:8). God created & sustains & governs & justifies the ungodly *solus Deo gloria*.

3. How is God glorified most fully by His people? Our salvation is from God, as we've seen. He is the One who planned it & only He could have planned a way of salvation that meets all the requirements of His justice &, at the same time, justify sinners. Only God could have planned a salvation that's apart from any human merit or works. It's all of grace, but yet it transforms us & enables us to do good works. Our salvation isn't just from God, it is also through God, through the finished work of Jesus. What does this mean for us & God's glory? As John Piper has famously & often said, *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*. The pastors & theologians who wrote the summary of Reformation teaching in the Westminster Catechism were giving expression to this as well when they said, *Man's chief end is to glorify God & enjoy Him*

forever. They didn't just say our goal is to glorify God, but to glorify God & enjoy Him. They didn't call glorifying & enjoying 2 different ends, but one singular end. They discerned what Paul meant when he said, **To die is gain** (Phil 1:20). The way Christ's supreme beauty & value would shine brightest would be for Paul to be most satisfied in Christ, even in suffering, & ultimately death. When God planned in eternity to justify the ungodly the way He did so that He Himself would be glorified, He didn't mean for us to find His glory boring or commonplace. He meant for us to find it all-satisfying, not because our happiness is the ultimate aim of the universe, but because the all-glorious God is shown to be the supreme Treasure when He becomes the supreme Pleasure of His people. Again, Jonathan Edwards says, *God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it.*⁴ When God justifies sinners by grace alone, on the basis of Christ alone, through faith alone, His aim is to open to us the path of life. Where does that path lead? Ps 16:11 tells us, **You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.** God's glory & our joy join together into everlasting fullness. We were created for one reason: to glorify God. God is glorified in His creation, in His children, in the gospel, & most fully in His own Son. Nevertheless, we always fail to glorify Him as we should. Yet God saves us anyway through His gospel.

4. If God alone gets the glory, what about our glorification? When we say *to God alone be glory* we mean that whatever glory is shared with man is a glory that calls attention to the source & end of all things, God Himself. The Bible is perfectly clear that God's children will be glorified with the glory of God.

We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

Beloved, now we are children of God, & it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

These whom He predestined, He also called; & these whom He called, He also justified; & these whom He justified, He also glorified (Rom 8:30).

⁴ John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, p 79

Why is God so intent on making us glorious with His own glory? The reason for this isn't hard to see: Jesus said His aim for us is that His joy might be in us & our joy might be full (Jn 15:11; 17:13). But you can't put the jet engine of a F-16 into a Honda Civic. You can't fit the volcano of God's joy in the thimble of our unglorified souls. You can't put all-glorious joy in inglorious people. We will be glorified, because it's the only way we can be fully satisfied in God, so that God alone will be fully glorified in us (Jn 17:24–26). God delights to glorify Himself through us, magnifying His love & mercy through redeeming sinful people, enabling them to glorify Him in their sanctified living, & glorifying them on the last day. The idea of our glorification isn't opposed to the principle of *Soli Deo Gloria* because our glorification is God's own work & it too is for the supreme glorification of our great God.

Soli Deo Gloria is a reminder that by twisting the gospel or by adding works or merit to the gospel, one is actually missing the glory that comes through a gospel of faith & grace, through Jesus, & given to us in Scripture. I trust & pray are drawn to Jesus, to embrace Him by faith alone. Because all of us who trust Him, no matter how sinful we've been, are now justified by grace alone, with no merited favor, on the basis of Christ alone, with no other sacrifice or righteousness, through the means of faith alone, not including any human works whatsoever, to the end that we might enjoy God alone as the supreme Treasure of our lives, & so display that all glory belongs ultimately to Him alone. If we've been saved by God's grace alone, redeemed by the work of Christ alone, & are justified through faith alone, then our worship of our God must exceed songs of praise on a Sunday morning. Our entire life is to be lived in the presence of God for His glory alone. As Luther said,

How could the devil have led us more effectively astray than by the narrow conception that service to God takes place only in church & by the works done therein ... the whole world could abound with services to the Lord, not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, field. What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God... We should accustom ourselves to think of our position & work as sacred & well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position & work, but on account of the word & faith from which the obedience & the work flow.⁵

⁵ quoted in O. E. Feucht, *Everyone a Minister*, p 80

God delights to glorify Himself in part by glorifying His people & allowing us to glorify His name. *Soli Deo Gloria* really does revolve around God & His own action, even while granting a place for us to glorify Him through our faith, worship, & service.

As we turn to Scripture alone to hear the message of salvation through Christ & His grace alone, received by faith alone, we find that blessed gospel woven into the great story of God's glory. Glory belongs to God alone, & that truly is good news for sinners saved by grace. It is God alone who saves us & it is God alone who preserves us. All things are from Him, through Him, & to Him – to Him be the glory forever!