

**God's Word Is the *Sola* Source of Truth – 2 Timothy 3:14-17**

You probably weren't expecting a Latin lesson when you came to church this morning, but when people speak of the Reformation, you often come across Latin phrases. After all, Latin was the language of the schools and the church for centuries. So it shouldn't surprise us when we come across phrases like *simul justus et peccator*, which means "at the same time sinner and saint," or the emblem on the cover of our worship folders—*Verbum Domini manet in aeternum*, which means "The Word of the Lord endures forever." Yet the most famous word associated with the Reformation—*sola*—simply means "alone." So what's so important about *sola*?

When Martin Luther and the other Reformers attached that word *sola* ("alone") to words like faith or grace or Scripture or Christ, they cut away centuries of false teaching that had wrapped mankind's self-centered, self-righteous works around how we become right with God. With *sola*, they removed the burden of how we become right with God off our shoulders and placed it right where God wants it to be—on himself. They revealed once more to a world that had gotten lost in sin's blinding darkness what Scripture alone can reveal—the truth that God makes us right with himself through his Son Jesus Christ purely because of his grace alone, which we receive by faith alone in Christ alone and in no other, not even ourselves.

God's Word, then, is the *sola* source of truth! The Bible isn't just a collection of ancient writings from various sources compiled over nearly 2,000 years. The Bible does not contain God's Word. Rather the Bible is the Word of God, the very breath of God, the thoughts of God revealed through human writers to save a broken and dying world, to transform sin's foolishness into heavenly wisdom that compels us to serve our God until he calls us home to heaven. You will not find that heavenly truth of grace alone and faith alone and Christ alone anywhere else in our entire world. How precious, then, is that Word of God in every aspect of our lives from womb to tomb! O God, our Lord, we give thanks that your Word makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus!

*Hear now a reading from 2 Timothy 3.*

**God's Word Reveals God's Gracious Plan – Romans 3:21-28**

Some have said that the entire Bible centers around a single verse, a single promise made to a man and a woman. They hadn't just disobeyed God's command. No, they had singlehandedly brought ruin and decay to all creation, plunging nearly every one of their descendants into the vile waters of sin and death. Yet not every one of their descendants would be corrupted with sin. You see, the Lord in his gracious love made a promise of a holy Child, a Savior born of woman, yet also truly God, who would crush the power of Satan forever. A glorious promise, but what does that promise have to do with you and your life and your struggles right now?

How God carried out his gracious plan of sending our Savior Jesus Christ made all the difference in the world for a German monk named Martin Luther. As Luther penned the words of *Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice*, he recalled how his life had become *a living hell*. Luther's life certainly looked that way as he tried to beat the sin out of himself, but God in his grace did not abandon Luther. No, he sent Jesus to ransom him from the slavery of guilt, to reconcile him—a sinner!—with the holy God, and to put himself in Luther's place in the courtroom of the holy God to declare him righteous.

What of you? How has God carried out his gracious plan through Christ for you? Yes, you have fallen short of God's holy will along with everyone else in this room and world, but Christ came to set you free too! Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice because God has carried out his saving plan and liberated you through Christ!

*Hear now a reading from Romans 3.*

**God's Word Is Powerful and Effective – Romans 1:16-17**

Who knew that a single sentence could be so troublesome? *The righteous will live by faith*. When Luther read those words, he focused on the phrase "*the righteous*," and oh, how it troubled him! He read the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 1 about that "*righteousness*," and all he could think of was the holiness that God demanded from him. Luther knew he was reading gospel here. It's right there in the text! Yet Luther saw that good news of Jesus as a hammer that condemned him rather than healed him.

...But Luther kept wrestling with those words up in his tower room in Wittenberg. After all, he did have to prepare for his weekly university lectures on the book of Romans. But rather than Luther convincing himself otherwise, the Word of God went to work on his heart and mind. To quote Luther, "*The Word did everything*." The writer of Hebrews tells us that "*the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword*," and oh, how

it worked! As Luther studied, he began to realize that those words, “*The righteous will live by faith,*” had nothing to do with his own righteousness and had everything to do with God’s righteousness in Christ that gave him life “*by faith*” alone. Who knew that a single sentence could be so liberating?

Is the Word of God still powerful and effective today—in an age when the Word is mocked as ancient foolishness compared to modern thought and science? Perhaps the better question should be: “Is the Word of God any less powerful and effective today?” We could spend hours reveling in the stories of countless souls in whose hearts the Word has worked, changing their lives forever. Or to make it more personal, you’re here. You and those around you wouldn’t be here if the Word was no longer powerful and effective. I wouldn’t be here either. So even in an age that mocks and ignores the effectiveness of Scripture, we can take God’s Word out to the world and watch our God go to work through his Word, because as it always has—the Word does everything!

*Hear now a reading from Romans 1.*

### **God’s Word Is My Path to Life – Ephesians 2:1-10**

No one goes from death to life. We’ve all lost loved ones to death, but no matter how much we wish or hope, they don’t come back. We bid them farewell, and for those loved ones who trusted in Jesus as their Savior, we look forward to seeing them again in heaven, but we don’t expect them to come back to this life anymore.

...But isn’t that what Paul describes in Ephesians 2? He flat out says, “*you were dead in your transgressions and sins...*” There’s no getting around that reality. In fact, he goes even further saying, “*By nature, we were objects of wrath,*” gratifying our sinful cravings and subjected to Satan’s control. “**But...**”—there’s that little word that makes all the eternal difference in the world for us and a whole heaven full of souls! “*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ!*” If we read further, we see God lay out the one and only path for us to go from death to life—*grace*. By grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, we are made alive and we live as ones who are alive!

You and I couldn’t possibly find that path on our own. We’re too blinded with sin and too beholden to the sinful cravings of our hearts, but through Christ, God opened the path. Like a big double-bladed snowplow in the middle of a lake-effect squall, God opened the path from death to life. Why? Because he’s rich in mercy. Because he’s filled to overflowing with self-sacrificing love. Because he is gracious, so by faith we stand before him alive in Christ!

*Hear now a reading from Ephesians 2.*

### **God’s Word Gives Me Confidence in Christ – Philippians 3:4b-14**

Luther had gained so much. People flocked to hear him preach and teach. They begged for his opinion on everything or for him to write prefaces for their books and pamphlets. His name made them instant bestsellers. He had a beloved and gifted wife and a quiver full of children. He had godly friends and colleagues and the respect of powerful rulers, but the last thing Martin Luther ever wrote were these words: *We are beggars—that is true*. Why would Luther so willingly dismiss it all as the mere rags of a beggar? Christ was his everything!

Perhaps he had in mind the words of Paul, who spoke of his own accomplishments. “*I consider them worthless dung that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—that righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*” Knowing Jesus was all that mattered to Paul, so he was willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of Christ. Knowing Jesus moved Paul to keep struggling and straining joyfully on the journey through this life until Christ brought him home to heaven.

Where is your confidence? Is it in the worthless trash of this life or in the eternal treasure of Christ Jesus? Consider the righteousness Christ gives you before God—not what you do or who you are or where you come from, but what Jesus did for you—and that fills your heart with confidence! Compared to Christ, we are beggars—that’s true and that’s okay because your confidence leans wholly on Christ. That confidence helps you in times of difficulty and heartache, trouble and grief, even in those times when you might have to suffer for the sake of Christ. That confidence helps you keep struggling and straining towards your heavenly goal confident that what awaits you in heaven is already yours because Jesus is your confidence, your joy, your everything.

*Hear now a reading from Philippians 3.*

## **God's Word Lifts My Eyes to Eternity – Revelation 7:9-17**

In June 1530, the Reformation was at a major crossroads. Lutheran princes and theologians labored in the German city of Augsburg to publicly present a clear statement of what they believed and taught. But Luther wasn't with them. You see, he had a price on his head for heresy and if he traveled outside of his home territory to Augsburg, he might never come back. So he wrote and prayed and wrote and prayed some more. Amidst all that writing and praying, Luther wrote a letter to his young son Hans with a lovely description of heaven—at least what would be considered heaven for a young boy of that era, a heaven full of golden fruit and fine coats, ponies to ride and musical instruments to play, and golden crossbows to shoot. Luther the father lifted his son's eyes towards heaven, urging his son to serve his Lord until he got there.

All throughout the Scriptures, our heavenly Father does the same for you and me. He lifts our eyes towards heaven, towards eternity, towards the Mountain of the Lord and the New Jerusalem, towards the wedding supper of the Lamb—and fills our hearts with comfort, with hope, with strength for the work ahead. With such a heavenward focus, he enables our hands and feet and minds to carry out the various callings that God himself has given us, to carry them out until he calls us home. Our heavenly Father lifts our eyes heavenward. What a breathtaking sight that will be when we stand beside him in the eternal glories of heaven!

*Hear now a reading from Revelation 7.*