

# The 'Only' Option: Three 'Solos' of the Reformation

## Introduction: 'Happy Birthday to Us!'

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### Intro: "Happy Birthday to us!"

- Talkin' 'bout a Revolution (head, hands & heart)
  - a reformation
    - a rediscovery
      - a retrieval
      - a revolution
        - theologically (God, humanity, salvation)
        - ecclesiologicaly (the church)
        - socially, politically, educationally, economically (the world)
- What the 'solos' are:

**1. *Sola Scriptura***, meaning "Scripture alone": The Bible is the sole and final authority in all matters of life and godliness. The church looks to the Bible as its ultimate authority.

**2. and 3. *Sola Gratia***, meaning "grace alone," and ***Sola Fide***, meaning "faith alone": Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. It is not by works; we come to Christ empty-handed. This is the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, the cornerstone of the Reformation.

**4. *Solus Christus***, meaning "Christ alone": There is no other mediator between God and sinful humanity than Christ. He alone, based on his work on the cross, grants access to the Father.

**5. *Soli Deo Gloria***, meaning "the glory of God alone": All of life can be lived for the glory of God; everything we do can and should be done for his glory. The Reformers called this the doctrine of *vocation*, viewing our work and all the roles we play in life as a calling.<sup>1</sup>

- What the 'solos' do:
  - a flag:
  - a fence:
  - a foundation:
  - a filter

"they are distinct emphases on the one essential truth of the gospel"<sup>2</sup>

### The only option that makes all the difference

- What the 'solos' mean for us 500 years on

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation* (Crossway, 2007)

<sup>2</sup> Graeme Goldworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics* (IVP, 2006), 46.

# 1. 'Nothing in my hand I bring' (*Sola Gratia*)

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## Introduction

Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone

“the article of a standing or falling church” (Luther)

“the main hinge on which religion turns” (Calvin)



“The best preparation for the study of this doctrine is neither great intellectual ability, nor much scholastic learning, but a conscience impressed with a sense of our actual condition as sinners in the sight of God.” (Buchanan)

## DO VS DONE

### 1. Wrestling with grace

*Nothing comes from nothing*

*Nothing ever could*

*So somewhere in my youth or childhood*

*I must have done something good. (Rodgers & Hammerstein)*

“Grace is especially troublesome for control freaks – sinners curved in themselves, bent on securing their own existence and status.”<sup>3</sup>

Grace = God’s unmerited favour:

- *Common* grace (restraining and preserving)
- *Special* grace (saving in and through the work of Christ)
  - Unmerited favour in the life of the church and the believer saved by grace

### 2. The problem: Dead means Dead

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh<sup>[a]</sup> and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:1-9)

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<sup>3</sup> Vanhoozer, Biblical Authority after Babel, 40.

"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." (Rom. 8:7)

## 2. 'Problems' with the problem: Are we really that dead?

- **Pelagianism - Pelagius**

CANON 1. If anyone denies that it is the whole man, that is, both body and soul, that was "changed for the worse" through the offence of Adam's sin, but believes that the freedom of the soul remains unimpaired and that only the body is subject to corruption, he is deceived by the error of Pelagius and contradicts the scripture ...

CANON 4. If anyone maintains that God awaits our will to be cleansed from sin, but does not confess that even our will to be cleansed comes to us through the infusion and working of the Holy Spirit, he resists the Holy Spirit himself... (Council of Orange, 529)

- **Semi-Pelagianism – 'Pre-reformation church and post-Reformation Trent'**

God accepts the act of a person who does his very best as a basis for bestowing the first grace. This is not because of any obligation in justice, but because of his generosity. Now, when the soul removes the obstacle[to grace] (by ceasing from the act of sin, by ceasing to consent to it and by eliciting a good movement toward God as its principal and end) it does its very best. Therefore God, in his liberality, accepts this act of the removal of the obstacle and the good movement toward himself and infuses grace into the soul (Gabriel Biel, Comm. on Sentences 2.27.1)

i.e. If you do your best, God will do the rest.

IX. Whosoever shall say that the wicked is justified by faith alone, in such a sense that nothing else is required in the way of co-operation to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is in no respect necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Session 6)

- **The Reformer's problem with the problems to the problem (getting silly now....)**

When by the singular kindness of God, the impiety of Pelagius was repudiated with the common consent of the ancient Church, they no longer dared to talk so pertly of human merit. They, however, devised a middle way, by which they might not give God the whole in justification, and yet give something.... Such indeed is their mode of prefacing, that at the outset they breathe nothing but Christ; but when they come to the subject, far are they from leaving him what is his own. Nay, their definition at length contains nothing else than the trite dogma of the schools: that men are justified partly by the grace of God and partly by their own works; thus only showing themselves somewhat more modest than Pelagius was. (Calvin, Antidote, on 6th session)

## 3. The 'only' solution: "But God....."

26. *The law says, "Do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this," and everything is already done.* [Luther, Heidelberg Disp . 26]

‘God has surely promised his grace to the humbled: that is, to those who mourn over and despair of themselves. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realises that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsels, efforts, will and works, and depends absolutely on the will, counsel, pleasure and work of Another – God alone. As long as he is persuaded that he can make even the smallest contribution to his salvation, he remains self-confident and does not utterly despair of himself, and so is not humbled before God; but plans out for himself (or at least hopes and longs for) a position, an occasion, a work, which shall bring him final salvation. But he who is out of doubt that his destiny depends entirely of himself, chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work in him and such a man is very near to grace for his salvation.’ (Luther, *Bondage of the Will* p. 100)

- **The irresistibility of Grace**

- **The sovereignty of Grace**

*1:8 "This... election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather, for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of each of the benefits of salvation. Faith, holiness, and other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, He chose us (not because we were, but) so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love (Eph 1:4)."*

- **The costliness of Grace**

“Sin is a violent lethal rebellion against God; and biblical grace is God’ violent, raw, and bloody response”<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. So what?

- **Our Comfortable certainty in the grip of grace**

I frankly confess that, for myself, even, if it could be, I should not want free-will to be given me, nor anything left in my own hands to enable me to endeavour after salvation; not merely because in face of so many dangers, and adversities, and assaults of devils, I could not stand my ground and hold fast to my ‘free-will’...but because, even were there no dangers, adversities or devils, I should still be forced to labour with no guarantee of success...But now that God has taken away my salvation out of the control of my own will, and put it under the control of his, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to his own grace and mercy, I have comfortable certainty that he is faithful and will not lie to me, and that he is also great and powerful, so that no devils or opposition can break him or pluck me from him. ‘No one’ he says, ‘shall pluck them out of my hand, because my Father which gave them to me is greater than all’ (Jn. 10:28-29). Furthermore, I have the comfortable certainty that I please God, not by reason of the merit of my works, but by reason of his merciful favour promised to me; so that, if I work too little, or badly, he does not impute it to me, but with fatherly compassion pardons me and makes me better. This is the glorying of all the saints in their God. (Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 313f)

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Trueman, *Grace Alone* (Zondervan, 2017), 31.

- **Chillax (a.k.a 'Keep calm and carry on') and engage with grace**

Grace shapes our encounters with the world by first promising that nothing will ever harm us eternally and second, by motivating us to better things, better standards, better ways of thinking about the things we encounter. Where the law motivates with the threat of punishment, grace motivates with the promise of joy. We can step into the world with a sense of invitation. This is our Father's world. What do we want to explore today? (Casper, *The Stories we tell* p. 52f.)

- **Cherish the church as both an act and means of grace**

A grace-alone church will be one that unashamedly declares God's sovereign priority over all creation and his sovereign priority over the church and her people. ..only in this way can pastors confidently counsel people, knowing that, whatever the problem may be, our sovereign gracious God is in control. Only in this way can the man whose wife of fifty years is descending into the fog of Alzheimer's disease know that all is still well and that, if not a sparrow drops to the grounds without the Lord knowing it, his agonies and those of his wife are seen by the Lord and are under his control. (Carl Trueman, *Grace Alone*, 237.)