

Andrew Cook:

This year we're marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, here on Serving Today.

The protestant Reformation began when a German monk, called Martin Luther, published 95 points on which he took issue with the Church's official teaching.

Last time, two of the Reformation's main principles: 'Scripture alone' and 'Grace alone' were summarised for us by Philip Parsons and he's now going to take us through the Reformation's other key doctrines, in the company of Derek French.

Derek French:

Of course 'Grace alone' is linked very closely with the next one, isn't it, which is 'Faith alone'. That was another watchword of the Reformation.

Expand that a bit for us, Philip.

Philip Parsons:

Yes. Well again we go back to Luther and his experience. It was the words of Scripture, '*the just shall live by faith*', quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans, which first shone light into his soul.

He was a devout Augustinian monk and he had believed that he could only ensure his salvation by a whole host of good works. He says, '*If ever monk could have been saved by his monkish works then I would have been*'. And so it was the result from his study of the book of Romans. He began to see that all had been done by another and that all the benefits were to be received by faith and faith alone.

When he finally came to see that, that night he said, speaking of his conversion, '*I fell into the arms of a loving heavenly Father*'.

Derek:

Yes, a rather delightful way of describing your salvation isn't it?

Philip:

It is, yes. So important did Luther consider this principle to be, that in his translation of Romans 3:28 into German he actually inserts the word 'alone' for emphasis, although it's not in the original Greek. It is perhaps this principle above all others which marks out Biblical Christianity from all other religions and all deviant forms of the Christian faith.

On the surface they will speak of the importance of faith for salvation, but when you probe them you find that our works contribute in some way to our salvation. The question then is, do we stand where Luther did?

We begin the Christian life by faith alone and it must be by faith alone that we continue to stand, so that when we come to depart this scene our comfort will not be drawn from what our hands have done, but only in the finished work of Christ on our behalf.

Derek:

Yes I think again of those words again from Ephesians 2, '*For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*' and I think that's very important, isn't it.

Philip:

Yes, because even faith is God's gift.

Derek:

Yes. The fourth tenet was 'Christ alone'.

Philip:

Yes, this follows on logically from 'Faith alone', because if we do not have the right object of faith, it's not a true faith. Many have some kind of faith today, but how many really do trust in Christ alone and his finished work?

There are so many things that can draw us away from the simplicity which is in Christ. In the medieval times it was the works of the saints through whom grace could come. Many exalt Mary as the object of faith above her Son. The danger for some of us is to have a misplaced faith in doctrine or orthodoxy, but if we do not go from the doctrine about the person to the person himself, then we are little better off than those who do not believe the doctrine.

The question is, have you really entrusted yourself to Christ against all the issues of life and death? If you have Christ you have everything, but without Christ you have nothing.

Derek:

And, Philip, the final phrase of the Reformation was 'Sola Deo Gloria', to 'The Glory of God alone'. Expand that a little bit for us.

Philip:

Yes. Well again, going back to Luther, the great question as a young man was '*How can I be saved?*' But in later years he turned to a deeper question: '*How can I glorify God?*' And surely it is this question and how we answer it that will have a profound effect on not only on what we do but also the way we do it.

It isn't so much of what we do for God, done with mixed motives. Isn't there still too much a measure of self-gratification in even what we do for the Lord? How much is done for him because of a desire to bring honour and glory to him? Let us ask these questions of ourselves honestly and confess where we fail.

And again, aren't we sometimes so busy, even in the Lord's work, that we can forget the paramount need to seek his glory? And what about the glory of God in our worship? We need to watch that the desire to be relevant and modern doesn't overshadow the principle of doing all to the glory of God. Let 'Soli Deo Gloria' be our watchword.

If we can really grasp these five Reformation watchwords and hold tenaciously to them we will not go far wrong. May God help us to do so and grant his church another reformation which we so desperately need.