

Reformation Theology: Sola Deo Gloria

July 23, 2017 – Rev. Brian Hand

Soli Deo Gloria is theological thread that ties together the other solas. The reason we rely on Scripture alone, the reason we must be saved By Christ, by grace, and justified by faith alone.

Definition: The ultimate end of all God's works in creation, providence and redemption is his own glory alone. The answer to the question, "Why does God do what he does?"

1. This doctrine is centered on God, his works and purposes.
2. It is concerned with ALL of God's works in creation, providence, and redemption.
3. It identifies the ultimate goal/end/purpose of God's works.
4. Identifies that ultimate goal as God's glory alone

Additional Definitions:

God's glory: the radiant splendor of God, displayed in his character and works.

To glorify God: to reflect or celebrate the radiant splendor of God. It does not add to his glory. It reflects or celebrates what he already has. Reflect is a sort of involuntary action that Scripture says all of creation does. Celebrating adds the worship and praise in a voluntary way.

Reflect = involuntary

Celebrate = voluntary

Ultimate ends vs. proximate ends:

- Ex 1: Filled my car with gas (Act)
in order to drive to church (Proximate end)
in order to worship God (Ultimate end)

Having a single ultimate end does not rule out multiple proximate ends.

Implications

1. All good things come ultimately from God- including any goodness in us. If there were any goodness in us that didn't have it's origin in God then God wouldn't get the glory for it.
2. God is sovereign over all things and works all things for his ultimate glory (including human free choices). God can't work all things for his glory if he isn't ultimately in control of all things. There would always be a chance that something could happen beyond his control that wouldn't glorify him. Thus he must be sovereign even over human free choices. We

acknowledge this as biblical and true though such things are beyond our grasp. Our fallen desire to be autonomous causes us to push back against God's sovereignty over our free choices. Yet, at the same time, we are ultimately glad that God is in control and able to reign in the free choices of other people (terrorists/dictators/etc. might be much worse otherwise). When thought through well, we see that we depend on God's sovereignty over everything that exists. We need this to have an orderly universe rather than one of total chaos

3. God is the sole author of our salvation from start to finish. If God were not thus then he couldn't take all the credit and therefore he couldn't gain all the glory.
4. All our worship should be directed toward God alone. To worship something is to ascribe worth to it. And if we worship something else then we fail to give to God the glory he deserves.
5. All our endeavors should be conducted ultimately for God's glory alone. If God's ultimate purpose is to glorify himself and he created and redeemed us for his purpose then our ultimate purpose must serve his purpose.

Scriptural Support:

Isaiah 48:9-11

God's work of redemption is emphatically ultimately for his own sake, for his own glory. We see here that this is good news. The proximate end is that God's people would not be cut off, they are refined and this leads to their good but the ultimate end is God's glory

John 17:1-5

John 17 has much to say about God's glory. In the opening 5 verses you see Jesus talking about him glorifying the Father and the Father glorifying him and Jesus says he glorified the Father on earth, as the image of the invisible God he did more than just reflect God's glory and he celebrated the radiant splendor of the Father in his work. And the Father will glorify him by raising him up, seating him at his right hand and giving him a name above all names that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord...can you finish it off, to the glory of God the Father. He also mentions the glory he had with the Father before the world existed. Here we are given a little window into the inter-Trinitarian

relationship before creation where you have the Son celebrating the radiant splendor of the Father and the HS, The Father that of the Son and HS and the HS that of the Father and the Son. Every work of God in creation, providence and redemption, even the dynamic of the inter-Trinitarian relationship is, was, and will always be exalting, rejoicing in, magnifying the glory of God.

John 17:24

Verse 24 is where we come in. Jesus says he wants his people to be where he is. Why? Not so they can have their best life now and be successful, not so you can be happy and free from trouble. So you can see his glory. See success, financial stability, good health, good marriages, earthly blessings can never be an ultimate end because, you're going to die and then those things are of no use to you. But here in Jesus' high priestly prayer, interceding for his people, his prayer for their future is that they be with him to see his glory. We are going to unpack this more, but we are getting a hint here that not only is our highest aim to glorify God, but our highest good is also found in glorifying God.

Ephesians 1:3-14

There is much of praising God here for blessings/good things that have been granted to us as proximate ends of our being united to Christ but the ultimate end is the praise of his glory. Note also here that Paul's style of writing reflects him glorifying God and praising him even in the writing of these verses. These verses are all a single sentence in the original Greek! You cannot write a sentence this long in a disinterested way, this is doxology!

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 42:8; Isaiah 43:6-7; Daniel 4 (esp vv.30-32); Acts 12:23; Romans 11:33-36.
Revelation 4:11

Summary Argument/ Theological Basis:

- God is, by his very nature, the highest and most glorious of beings.
- God is, by his very nature, the beginning (source) and the end (goal) of all things.
- If God were to seek the glory of another, he would be denying his own nature.

- Therefore, God must work all things ultimately for his own glory alone.

Objections:

1. Scripture teaches that self-centeredness is a sin. You're telling me God is self-centered? The fact that God is perfect and the creator means that he should be self centered. For him not to be self centered would mean that something else was of equal or greater value than he is. While it is ultimately all about God it doesn't follow that it is all about God to the exclusion of all others in every way...there are proximate ends that lead to the ultimate end. We are the beneficiaries of God seeking his own glory. Oprah, Brad Pitt, C.S. Lewis (before his conversion), and many others have found this one thing to be something they can't get over, they see it as God being an egomaniac. Don Carson has said that over the last 30 years of doing evangelism on college campuses the questions have changed. It used to be about historical problems with Christianity, no it's how can you worship a God who is so self exalting, so self-centered, a God constantly pointing to his own greatness and telling people to recognize that greatness and then turn and tell him how much they like it. John Piper says he finds this to be a test. Do i rejoice in God's God-centeredness? or am I God-centered only because deep down I believe God is man-centered so that my supposed God-centeredness is really man-centered, even me-centered?

Here is how Lewis solved the issue for himself. "My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can't help doing, about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. Ex. my joy in my wife's beauty isn't complete if it resides in my mind, the joy is completed in telling her or in telling someone else about her beauty. So then, when God is pursuing or even demanding our praise, he is pursuing the completion of our joy. He is the all-satisfying beauty, greatness, wisdom, strength, kindness, and love. When he is glorified as our supreme treasure then we are not choosing between our satisfaction and his glory, they are one and the same and there is no higher good for us.

So while it is not proper for us to seek to exalt our self is the most appropriate thing for God to do. He is the source of the greatest happiness, the source and treasury of all good, the most satisfying gift he could give us is to seek his own glory. When he seeks his own glory and exalts himself he is loving us, being kind to us, merciful to us, giving us what will make us most deeply and

permanently happy. God is the only being for who self exaltation is the highest virtue. If you exalt yourself you're not loving anybody. You are distracting them from what makes them happy- God! When he exalts himself he isn't distracting you "come to me, love me, be filled with me, it is love and mercy.

2. If God seeks only his own glory then he doesn't really care about us. His care for us is a consequence of his self glorification. Through his care of us he comes to be glorified for his grace, mercy, goodness, kindness, compassion, love, faithfulness.

3. If we have to do everything for God's glory alone then we can't do anything for the sake of our fellow human beings simply because we love them.

This again would be a proximate end that leads to the greater end of glorifying God. In this we would be reflecting God who cares for us as a means to his glory. This is an important point for us to think on as a church. Think of our vision statement, gathering a people to live for Christ. That is the ultimate goal/ vision but there are proximate ends in achieving that summarized in these 4 strategies.

4. If God is sovereign and works all things for his glory then even our sins must glorify him. The conclusion is drawn that it is ok to sin. It is true that God works all things to his glory and that would include our sins,. Yet regarding our sins, God is glorified in his just punishment and wrath. Far better to be on the side of glorifying God's mercy and grace than justice.

Importance to the Christian Life

- *Soli Deo Gloria* points us back to the other four *Solas* and all their implications. Theological thread that ties together the other solas. The reason we rely on Scripture alone, the reason we must be saved By Christ, by grace, and justified by faith alone.
- *Soli Deo Gloria* enlarges our love and passion for God and our hatred for sin. The more we seek God's glory the more we will come to love him and hate the sin that represents the antithesis of God's glory. Romans 3: sin is falling short of God's Glory
- *Soli Deo Gloria* implies that it is right and good for us to seek our own pleasure in God. It is right and good to seek our own pleasure in God. We should seek a deeper communion with him through devotions, spiritual disciplines, worship, etc. But

not just “churchy” things...properly understood, our delight and pleasure in our families is a pleasure in the God who gave them to us, who sustains and protects us, provides for us, etc. Delight and pleasure in sports and leisure activities should be a delight in the God who gave us bodies capable of performing such acts, the God who created the environments many of them came take place in, and the God who has built time for rest and leisure into the creational order of evening and morning (rest time and work time), the sabbath pattern and calls on his people to rejoice in feast times (look how many feasts he prescribed for Israel, these were times to seek pleasure in God).

- *Soli Deo Gloria* demands that we honor the image of God in our fellow human beings. This is honoring the reflection of God’s image in humans and therefore honors God. True the image is tainted. This has profound ethical implications for abortion, euthanasia, the way we speak about other people, even people who are evil/our enemies.

- *Soli Deo Gloria* means that God is as committed to our salvation as he is to his own glory. If God has chosen us for salvation and his ultimate purpose in election is to glorify himself then nothing less than the glory of God is at stake in him succeeding in bringing us to glory.

- *Soli Deo Gloria* guards us against seeking our own glory in any of our endeavors.
Self explanatory

- *Soli Deo Gloria* encourages us to regularly re-evaluate all our activities and goals in life. Ask the question, are our goals, the things we are doing aligned in such a way that our ultimate aim is the glory of God. Are these the best ways to use our gifts and resources to accomplish our ultimate end.

- *Soli Deo Gloria* drives us to make our worship God-centered rather than man-centered. Evaluating what we are doing in our worship services. Focussed on God’s glory or to show our gifting. Designed for God’s glory or pleasing people. It is not that we don’t consider these things but they can never become the ultimate end.

- *Soli Deo Gloria* reminds us to seek the ultimate approval of God, not man.
Antidote against ungodly peer pressure.

- *Soli Deo Gloria* gives us a significant motivation for evangelism and worldwide mission.