

## Grace and Baptism (Part 4)

In the Protestant mainstream, it is common to hear about the “five solas,” that is, the “five alones.” It sounds something like this: We are saved <sup>1</sup>by grace alone, <sup>2</sup>through faith alone, <sup>3</sup>in Christ alone, <sup>4</sup>to the glory of God alone, <sup>5</sup>as taught in Scripture alone. I know it may seem shocking to you. But I think I actually agree with this statement (at least I do if I’m allowed to define these phrases). And yet, at the same time, I believe and teach this all happens at the point of immersion in water for the remission of sins, or at the point of baptism. Many people today would proclaim that I simply cannot do this. I cannot believe this. They would claim that believing I receive God’s salvation in baptism absolutely contradicts the five solas and adds in my works. In the previous three articles, I believe I’ve made a decent case for why it doesn’t contradict. In this one, I’d like to share some statements from some guys who seem to agree with me. I’d like to share with you some quotes from two of the captains and authors of salvation by grace alone through faith alone: John Calvin and Martin Luther.

John Calvin in Institutes of the Christian Religion (Vol. 2, Book IV, Chapter XV).

“Hence those who have thought that baptism is nothing else than the badge and mark by which we profess our religion before men, in the same way as soldiers attest their profession by bearing the insignia of their commander, having not attended to what was the principal thing in baptism; and this is, that we are to receive it in connection with the promise, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved’” (Section 1).

“I know it is a common belief that forgiveness, which at our first regeneration we receive by baptism alone, is after baptism procured by means of penitence...” (Section 4)” [While Calvin speaks against procuring forgiveness after baptism by penitence, he does claim we initially receive forgiveness “by baptism alone.” Is this a sixth sola?—*ELC*]

“...Christ by baptism has made us partakers of his death, ingrafting us into it” (Section 5).

“Wherefore we obtain, and in a manner distinctly perceive, in the Father the cause, in the Son the matter, and in the Spirit the effect of our purification and regeneration. Thus first John baptized, and thus afterwards the apostles by the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, understanding by the term *repentance*, regeneration, and by *remission* of sins, ablution” (Section 6).

“We ought to hold that we are baptized for the mortification of our flesh, which is begun in baptism, is prosecuted every day, and will be finished when we depart from this life to go to the Lord” (Section 11).

“In baptism, the Lord promises forgiveness of sins: receive it, and be secure. I have no intention, however, to detract from the power of baptism. I would only add to the sign the substance and reality, inasmuch as God works by external means. But from this sacrament, as from all others, we gain nothing, unless in so far as we receive in faith. If faith is wanting, it will be an evidence of our ingratitude, by which we are proved guilty before God, for not believing the promise there given” (Section 15).

“God in baptism promises the remission of sins, and will undoubtedly perform what he has promised to all believers” (Section 17).

Martin Luther in The Large Catechism of Martin Luther (“Fourth Part: Baptism”):

“You should not doubt, then, that Baptism is of divine origin, not something devised or invented by men...Moreover, it is solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we shall not be saved” (¶ 6).

“To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men but by God himself. Although it is performed by men’s hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act” (¶ 10).

“In the second place, since we know what Baptism is and how it is to be regarded, we must also learn for what purpose it was instituted, that is, what benefits, gifts, and effects it brings. Nor can we understand this better than from the words of Christ quoted above, ‘He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.’ To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save. No one is baptized in order to become a prince, but as the words say, to ‘be saved.’ To be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil and to enter into the kingdom of Christ and live with him forever” (¶23-25).

“Without faith Baptism is of no use, although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure. So this single expression, ‘He who believes,’ is so potent that it excludes and rejects all works that we may do with the intention of meriting salvation through them. For it is certain that whatever is not faith contributes nothing toward salvation, and receives nothing.

“However, it is often objected, ‘If Baptism is itself a work, and you say that works are of no use for salvation, what becomes of faith?’ To this you may answer: Yes, it is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however is not our work but God’s...God’s works, however, are salutary and necessary for salvation, and they do not exclude but rather demand faith, for without faith they could not be grasped...

“Thus you see plainly that Baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith. Therefore they are unfair when they cry out against us as though we preach against faith. Actually, we insist on faith alone as so necessary that without it nothing can be received or enjoyed’ (§ 34-37).

John Calvin and Martin Luther are the captains of the “solas,” the “alones.” They would defend to the death salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, as taught in Scripture alone. Yet, it seems pretty clear that they did not believe receiving this salvation by baptism contradicted this. I do not agree with everything they said about baptism. Nor should we believe this just because they did. I simply want us to note that as certain as they were that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, they were equally certain that this salvation was received by baptism alone. If these two, who were the captains and authors of the “solas” could see that, why can’t their spiritual offspring see it today? Why can’t we?

Perhaps we should have six solas, six alones. We are saved <sup>1</sup>by grace alone, <sup>2</sup>through faith alone, <sup>3</sup>in Christ alone, <sup>4</sup>to the glory of God alone, <sup>5</sup>on the authority of Scripture alone, <sup>6</sup>received by baptism alone. After all, Jesus did say, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (**Mark 16:16**, ESV).

—Edwin L. Crozier