

Osaka International Church
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Title: The Five Principles of the Protestant Reformation

Key verse: Romans 1:17 (NIV): “For in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: *The righteous will live by faith.*”

Good morning, everyone. It’s good to see you all today. I notice that this month (October), there are a few anniversaries that are going to be commemorated, anniversaries both big and small. One important anniversary for OIC is that this month marks 48 years since our first worship service was conducted in 1974. Next week, we will be celebrating that anniversary and I am preparing a sermon to mark that occasion in the life of Osaka International Church. You’ll hear that message next week.

Meanwhile, there is one small anniversary in my own life is occurring this season. It was five years ago this autumn that I presented my first sermon at OIC. And for that first sermon, I preached on a topic that is very close to my heart, and I am going to speak on that subject again today. And that brings me to the third anniversary which I want to mention in this introduction: this month of October is the anniversary of the birth of the Protestant Reformation. That was the topic of my first sermon for you five years ago, and today I would like to share that sermon with you again. I think it is important to remind ourselves of this key event and the principles that lie behind it. So, today I am sharing this sermon with you, though I have made a few refinements and changes to my original message. Here is the title: “The Five Principles of the Protestant Reformation.”

Every October, there are many Protestant churches which commemorate an important event, an event that changed the course of church history and, we can also say, changed the course of world history. What happened on that day in October 1517 was a rather small thing, but it was the spark that started a chain of events that rocked the church in Europe and still echoes today.

It was October 31st, 1517, the day before the great Christian festival called All Saint’s Day. This festival is celebrated on November 1st, and on the eve of that festival, in the city of Wittenberg in Germany, a Christian priest and theology professor named Martin Luther lit the spark of a movement that became the Protestant Reformation.

In my sermon today, I want to share with you some short clips from a movie on Martin Luther’s life. Here is the first clip I want to show you, the event on October 31st. In the first scene, you see Luther start to write an important document. After that, watch what he does.

(Let’s watch the first clip from the movie.)

Martin Luther (praying): Dear Lord Jesus Christ ... In this, as in all undertakings, not my will but thine be done. Amen.

Narrator: Wittenberg. The eve of All Saints Day. October 31st, 1517. Martin Luther was scarcely noticed as he passed by those who were waiting to worship before the relics about to be displayed in the Castle Church ... Nailing a notice to the door of the church was not unusual, for this was the customary place to post announcements of both university and public events ... Among those waiting to be forgiven and blessed, none could know that this document would become one of the most widely read in all history.

Today's sermon is part history lesson, part Bible exposition, and part personal testimony: my testimony and Martin Luther's. First some history, then some testimony.

What Luther did on this day looks like a simple action. But this document was an invitation to scholars to debate an issue of Christian practice which Martin Luther found to be unbiblical, in several different respects. So, actually, this was a rather provocative action. The issue at stake was the sale of what are called "indulgences." An "indulgence" is a sort of *pardon from sin*, issued to a Christian by a bishop or a pope or other church leader. I don't have the time to describe this practice in detail, but I'd like to point out that in Martin Luther's day, these indulgences were often offered for sale by the church. At this moment in time, a special indulgence from the pope was being used as a fundraiser to raise funds for special building projects in Rome. This abuse was too much for Luther. He was not the first person to speak out against indulgences, but his action on October 31st caught people's attention in a way that previous complaints did not.

On this document, Luther listed a series of one-sentence propositions which he was inviting scholars to debate. This list is known as the "Ninety-five Theses." In fact, on this same day, October 31st, Luther mailed a copy of his "Ninety-five Theses" to the archbishop. He wanted to bring to the attention of the archbishop the theological and practical problems he saw in relation to indulgences and the way they were being marketed.

This story is special to me for several reasons. During the first twelve years of my life, my family attended a Lutheran church. My mother was not from a Lutheran background, but this church had the best Sunday School in our town, so she wanted her children to attend it. I got a great foundation here of Christian teaching: the Creation, the call of Abraham, the twelve patriarchs, Moses, David, Jesus and the disciples, and the rest of the Bible story. And we heard about Martin Luther and some other heroes of church history.

I have traveled to the city of Wittenberg and have visited the sites associated with Luther. Here is a photo of the church doors of the Castle Church as they look today. The original doors were made of wood and they are long gone. Today, there is a set of bronze doors and all 95 Theses are inscribed on them.

I did not join the Lutheran church. While in college, I became a Christian in a non-denominational church. In my 20's, I joined a Baptist church.

But in the past few years, I have been reflecting a great deal on the wonderful Christian foundation my mother gave to her children: the best Sunday School in town. And I've been reflecting on the Reformation and its emphasis on Scripture, on following the Bible in all areas of life (inside and outside church). I've come to have a deep appreciation of the Reformer's emphasis on the preaching of the Word of God from the pulpit every Sunday. We are the inheritors of these people's passion for the Word of God and their emphasis on ordering our lives according to Scripture.

Today's topic: "The Five Principles of the Protestant Reformation."

In the years after Martin Luther lit the spark that ignited the Reformation, the movement was marked by these five principles, each beginning with the Latin word "Sola," meaning "only" or "alone." Five principles, stated in Latin:

Principle Number 1: *Sola Scriptura* ... “By Scripture Alone.”

According to this principle, Scripture must stand above all church traditions, all teachings and any decisions made by church councils. The Bible is our final authority on all matters of Christian faith and practice.

These five principles were developed in contradistinction to mediaeval Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. It seemed to the Reformers that the Catholic Church was putting church traditions and the declarations of the church leadership *ahead* of what the Bible teaches. So, the Reformers were calling the Church back to making the Bible primary.

Principle Number 2: *Sola Fide* ... “By Faith Alone.”

Justification is by faith alone, without works. We don't work for our salvation.

Principle Number 3: *Sola Gratia* ... “By Grace Alone.”

Salvation comes by divine grace, the grace of God. From beginning to end, salvation is the work of God.

Principle Number 4: *Solus Christus* or *Solo Christo* ... “Christ Alone” or “By Christ Alone.”

Christ is the only mediator between man and God, as 1st Timothy 2:5 specifically says. *Through Christ alone*, we have access to the Father.

Principle Number 5: *Soli Deo Gloria* ... “Glory to God Alone.”

All that we do should be done to the glory of God. Any good thing in us is from God – we do not take credit for it. He gets the glory.

These five principles are known as the “Five Solae.” Now that I have introduced them, I would like to look at each one of them in more detail. There is a lot to say on the first principle, so I will spend most of my time on that one.

Principle Number 1: *Sola Scriptura* ... “By Scripture Alone.”

This is the doctrine that the Bible is the sole and final authority in all matters of Christian faith and practice.

Let me start with a quote from the New Testament. This is the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy, who was serving in the church in Ephesus. Second Timothy 3:14-17 says:

¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (NASB)

Take a look at verse 16; a crucial verse: “All Scripture is inspired by God.” The word “inspired” literally means “God-breathed” – the Scriptures are breathed out by God, they are authoritative, they are from God our Creator. And this verse says the Scripture is “profitable.” Profitable for teaching us about God and about how we are to live our lives. Profitable for reproof and correction – rebuking us when we have done wrong and setting us back on the correct path. And training in righteousness. Whenever I see this word “righteousness,” I often replace it with the phrase “right living.” “Training in *right living*.” We are to live the right way, in an honorable way, in the way that pleases God. The Scripture teaches us how to live in this right way. And verse 17: with the Scriptures as our guidebook, we are equipped for every good work, equipped for our ministry in the church – each one of us.

I have another verse for you, 2 Peter 1:20-21:

²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (NASB)

Here we see that the prophecies in Scripture do not come from the speaker's own interpretation or his own will, but these prophets were moved *by the Holy Spirit*. They *spoke from God*. They *spoke God's words*.

When the Reformers advanced their doctrine of Sola Scriptura, they were speaking out against the manner in which the Roman Catholic Church was often putting the traditions and pronouncements of the institutional Church ahead of Scripture. The Reformers said we have to keep the Word of God as primary in our doctrine and practice.

By the way, when we say "Sola Scriptura," "Scripture Alone," we do not throw out the writings of the church fathers; we don't throw out the sermons and books by our pastors and teachers. No. These writings *are* valuable. Most of the time they are orthodox and helpful. In fact, the Reformers often appealed to the writings of the church fathers, such as St. Augustine. But we have to keep in mind that these men were not perfect and that our final standard is the Bible itself.

I would like to tell you of another important project Martin Luther embarked on: the translation of the Bible into German. For the Reformers, it was crucial to get the Word of God into the language of the people. This was important to the so-called "Pre-Reformers" as well. In the 14th century in England, John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. In the 15th century in Bohemia, Jan Hus (John Huss) and his colleagues made needed improvements to the Bible in the Czech language. These groups translated from the Latin version of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate. But in the 16th century, a Greek text of the New Testament was published by the scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam. This was a tremendous gift to the church. Reformers such as Luther in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, and William Tyndale in England made use of this Greek text to make better translations of the Bible into the language of the people.

In closing this section on Sola Scriptura, I want to say two things. The first is that the Reformers called the church back to following the Bible as our only rule of faith and practice. The second is that we, the community of Christians, have this precious gift from God: the Bible. By it we know how to live. By it we know the way to eternal life, the way to a right relationship with our Creator. In the past few years as I have been studying church history, I have been reflecting a great deal on this. For most of Christian history, the common people were illiterate and unable to read this book for themselves. But due to the Reformers' call to order our lives by the Bible, due to the translation of this book into the common language, and with the invention of the printing press and the increase in literacy, we today have easy access to the Word of God. I urge all my fellow Christians to read this book, meditate on its words, keep on reading it and keep on meditating on it. Live by these words and get to know your God. What a precious gift we have.

Let us go on to the remaining four principles. I will spend less time on these than I spent on the first one.

Principle Number 2: *Sola Fide* ... “By Faith Alone.”

This is what justification is all about: it is by **faith alone**, without works. This is in contradistinction to what was going on in the mediaeval church, where there was often an effort to gain salvation through the performance of religious good works.

In his younger years as a new monk, Martin Luther was often distressed by the sin he saw in his heart. He was not struggling with sins of the flesh. He was struggling with his thought-life: he felt that his mind was so often straying from the things of the Lord and that he did not love God the way he thought he should. Actually, he often felt terrified of God. He did not see how he could be accepted by an all-powerful, all-holy God.

And then, as he was preparing lectures in the Epistle to the Romans, he experienced what he called the birthday of his faith. He discovered the answer in Romans 1:17:

¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “*The righteous will live by faith.*” (NIV)

By faith. From beginning to end. Faith is central. Luther finally understood that it is by Christ’s finished work on the cross that man is justified before God. Not by what we do. We accept God’s gift of salvation *through faith*. And we live our lives *by faith*.

I would like to share with you another film clip from the movie on Martin Luther’s life. In this clip, he is sort of arguing with his spiritual father, the leader of the Augustinian monks. Here Luther tells him of what he found in the Epistle to the Romans and he contrasts that with some of the religious practices of his day, which Luther considered unhealthy to proper Christian living and not sanctioned by Scripture.

(Here is the second film clip.)

Martin Luther: ... A growing certainty. Dear vicar, what little certainty I had you gave to me. You heard my sin, you sent to Rome to fortify my faith, you sent me to scripture to find my God. You brought me here to Wittenberg to preach His Word. And here in my room, I’ve been preparing my lectures on the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans. And here, I think I’ve found the truth at last. And when I found it, it was as though the gates of heaven were opened to me. Romans 1:17.

The vicar-general (quoting the Bible, first in Latin): “*Iustitia enim Dei...*” Hmm. “*Iustitia enim Dei...*”. “For the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written: *The just shall live by faith.*” And so...?

Martin Luther: Worthy vicar, do we find anything here of relics? By faith man lives and is made righteous. Not by what he does for himself. Be it adoration of relics, singing of masses, pilgrimages to Rome, purchase of pardon for his sins. But by faith in what God has done for him already through His son.

The vicar-general: Dr. Martin. If you leave the Christian to live only by faith, if you sweep away all good works, all these glorious things you dismiss as “mere crutches,” what will you put in their place?

Martin Luther: Christ. Man only needs Jesus Christ.

(The vicar-general stands and leaves)

Martin Luther: *The just shall live by faith. Alone.*

Sola Fide ... “By Faith Alone.”

Let us go on to the next three principles. I will cover these fairly quickly.

Principle Number 3: *Sola Gratia* ... “By Grace Alone.”

I would like to take a look at the beginning of Ephesians chapter 2:

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world ... ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by **grace** you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ 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. ⁸ For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

Look at verse one:

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked... (ESV)

And another verse, John 6:44. Jesus says:

^{44a} No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him... (NASB)

Dead. We are spiritually dead ... helpless to save ourselves. Only by God drawing us to His Son can we come to Him and be saved. This is the principle of *Sola Gratia*.

Let’s go back to Ephesians 2:8-10, which I will quote in a different translation. This is one of the great passages in Scripture:

⁸ For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the **gift of God**, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For **we are his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should **walk in them**. (ESV)

Verse 8: salvation is by grace through faith ... and it is not our own doing. Verse 9: it is not through works. Verse 10 tells us about work: it says we are God’s workmanship. We didn’t make ourselves, we didn’t save ourselves. He is the one who saves us and the one who molds us. For what purpose? To do good works. Good works come *after* salvation – this is how God designed it. He wants us to walk in these good works. Good works are a part of the Christian lifestyle, but they are not the means by which we are saved. That is the key point.

Principle Number 4: *Solus Christus* or *Solo Christo* ... “Christ Alone” or “By Christ Alone.”

First Timothy 2:5-6 says,

⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ^{6a} who gave himself as a ransom for all people... (NIV)

John 14:6 says,

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (NKJV)

There are many races of people on earth and many of them worship different gods, but there is only one way to reconciliation with the Creator of all of us: Jesus Christ, the son of God who gave His life to redeem mankind. He alone is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

First John 2:1-2 says,

¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (NIV)

Acts 4:12 says,

¹² Salvation is found in no one else [Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. (NIV)

This is the message that we have for the whole world.

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Here is a famous painting of Martin Luther. It shows him in the pulpit of his church pointing the congregation to Jesus Christ. "...*There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*" [Acts 4:12b]

Principle Number 5: *Soli Deo Gloria* ... "Glory to God Alone."

Everything we do should be done to the glory of God. In all undertakings, we should remember that God gives us the strength to accomplish them. Our salvation, too, is through God from start to finish. Therefore, we cannot boast about anything within ourselves that led to our salvation. We cannot take credit for anything. It is God who reached down to us, it is God the Father who sent His Son to earth to be our redeemer, it is God who draws us to Himself, and it is God who sends us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us and empower us for living the Christian life. All the glory belongs to Him.

I have some verses for you. Revelation 1:6,

⁶ And He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB)

Ephesians 3,

²¹ To Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (NASB)

First Peter 4,

¹¹ Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB)

First Corinthians 10,

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (NIV)
"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

I have a really vivid memory of one of my Sunday school lessons when I was a child. As I told you, I was attending a Lutheran church then. My second grade Sunday school teacher was named Mrs. Milne. Strangely, she is the only Sunday school teacher I had whose name I still remember. There was one lesson she taught that made a big impression on me. She introduced us to a new word: Vocation. No, this is not the word "vacation", Mrs. Milne told us. It's not about a taking a trip or relaxing for a few days. This is "vocation". "Vocation" refers to what you DO with your life. No, it doesn't mean your job, how you earn a living, she told us. Vocation is the WAY you live your life, with a deeper purpose than just earning a paycheck or going to school. We belong to God, and we should live with the purpose of honoring Him in our relationships, our workplace, our family life, in church and outside of church. Later on, during my college years, I heard more teaching along these same lines and this teaching was reinforced. I learned another slogan that was important to the Reformers: All of life under the Lordship of Christ. *All of life under the Lordship of Christ.*

This is how I have sought to live my life. Those of you who have heard me pray in a group setting may have heard my prayer that we honor God in everything we do. In private, it is my daily prayer for myself.

Well, I have come to end of my overview of the five principles of the Reformation. I want to end with one more clip from the Martin Luther movie. But before I show you the film, I want to say that after my sermon, I have asked the worship team to lead us in singing Martin Luther's most famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." It is based on Psalm 46:

¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble...

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Well, at the beginning of my sermon, I showed you one episode from Martin Luther's life, the famous one that ignited the Reformation. Next, I would like to show you another famous episode, when Luther gave a defense of his beliefs in front of the parliamentary assembly of the German states. Some churchmen wanted to send Luther to Rome for a church trial. But the prince of the region where Luther lived thought that the appropriate place for a trial was in the parliamentary assembly, which was at that time meeting in the city of Worms – that's pronounced "Vorms" (I know the spelling on the screen gives you a different image.) This assembly is known as the Diet of Worms.

I want to give you a full feeling of the context, so I have a five-minute clip here that begins with Duke Frederick of Saxony explaining his opinion of where Martin Luther should have his trial. After that, you will see Luther and his group journey to the city of Worms. Then you'll see the young Emperor Charles, the head of the Holy Roman Empire. Then you will see Luther's appearance in front of the assembly.

(Here is the last film clip.)

Duke Frederick: I have seen Martin Luther only once and I am not familiar with his writings. Nor do I follow his preachings as many of my loyal subjects do. But I know him as a man of strong convictions, learning, fear of God. Yet, even if he were a common thief I could not hand him to you to be dragged to Rome in chains. No, do not misunderstand me. It is not Luther the man who is important. It is a principle: that a man accused shall have a fair trial before his own countrymen. Luther is my subject, Aleander, and as he owes me loyalty, I owe him protection. I can do no less as a Christian and a prince. I suggest, therefore, that we bring this cause before the Diet and let it be decided in that parliament what shall be done with Luther.

Narrator: In the spring of 1521, Luther made his journey to the city of Worms, to appear before the Diet, the parliamentary assembly of the German states.

(Luther's group continues to Worms and enters the city)

Narrator: Waiting in Worms was the scion of the House of Hapsburg, Lord of Austria, Burgundy, the Low Countries, Naples, and Spain, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and Defender of the Holy Church, His Catholic Majesty Charles the Fifth.

Emperor Charles: I summon him for a trial, yet he comes like a conqueror... Are you certain you haven't made a mistake?

Cardinal Aleander: Your Majesty, how he enters is of no importance ... how he answers, is. We must give him no opportunity for speeches. Will Your Majesty approve our procedure of interrogation?

Emperor Charles (reads the procedure and accepts it): You have his books?

Archbishop of Mainz: Yes, Your Majesty. All of them.

(The assembly gathers)

The Chamberlain: Dr. Luther, you will say nothing until you are questioned ... Martin Luther, His Sacred and Invincible Majesty has cited you before his throne to answer certain questions: two in number, and only two. The first question: Do you admit these are your writings?

Martin Luther: Yes, they are mine.

The Chamberlain: His Imperial Majesty's second question, then, is: Will you, Martin Luther, persist in what you have written, or are you prepared to retract these writings and the beliefs they contain?

Martin Luther: Most Gracious Emperor, Princes, Lords, I came here prepared to debate, not for interrogation.

The Chamberlain: Dr. Luther, reply to the question. Will you or will you not recant what you have written?

Martin Luther: I do not understand this procedure. Recant? Am I not to be heard?

The Chamberlain: You have heard His Majesty's question. He is waiting for your answer.

Martin Luther: Most Serene Emperor, Illustrious Princes, Noble Lords, I am only a man and not God. But I must defend myself as did Jesus Christ when He said, as I say now, "If I have spoken evil bear witness against me!"

The Chamberlain: Martin Luther, you have not yet answered the question. Give us a simple answer. Will you recant, or will you not?

Martin Luther: You ask for a simple answer. Here it is. Unless you can convince me by Scripture and not by popes or councils, who have often contradicted each other ... unless I am so convinced that I am wrong, I am bound to my beliefs by the text of the Bible! My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience, is neither right nor safe! Therefore, I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.

In 1517, Martin Luther started a revolution. But he himself was actually a profoundly conservative person. He just wanted to follow the Bible. He believed the Bible was our final authority. And he had the courage to confront the institutional church when it went against the Word of God. He followed the Bible – to do anything else was neither right nor safe. "Here I stand," he said. "I can do no other."

Internet Resources:

The "Martin Luther" movie can be seen on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0dx7-tc1AY>

A lecture about Martin Luther from an excellent series: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56iHIhtGI4Q>

Web site on the Protestant Reformation: <http://protestantism.co.uk/reformers>