

Reforming Jewish Ministry

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Part 1: The Five Solas and Jewish Ministry

It is indeed a wonderful thing to behold the growth and advancement of the Good News of Messiah among the Jewish people. In the last 25 years or so, we have seen the establishment of many Messianic congregations which proclaim Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah of Israel. A renewed vision to worship and live out the New Covenant faith in a Jewish way is something we can all rejoice in. We have also seen a renewed interest in bold outreach to the Jewish community and a renewed sense of the Jewishness of the gospel in many churches. Many speak of a zeal to return to the true New Covenant faith as practiced by the early church. There are some parallels between this movement and the early days of the Reformation when society had a desire to return to “the fountains,” the original documents Christendom had been founded upon.



John Calvin

As the Reformation began, a number of important principles were established as guidelines. As the Reformation advanced, additional principles were added as the need for further reform was evident. After twenty five years exposure to and involvement in Jewish ministry, I am aware of some of the problems we face as well as some of the achievements. It is my thesis in this brief article that we in Jewish ministry

must once again consider the relevance of the principles of the Reformation if we are to see the renewal of New Covenant faith among the Jewish people that we all hope for. What are these principles? Let me briefly list and define five beginning principles, called the five “solas” and then articulate how these principles are relevant, indeed essential, to the ongoing enterprise of restoring the Biblical faith to the Jewish people.

Sola Scriptura - Scripture Alone

Everything that I command you you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it or take from it. (Deut.12:32) All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14-17)

By the time of the Reformation, Christianity had become dominated by many non-Biblical Roman Catholic church traditions. This had happened to the extent that the essential

message of the New Covenant had become obscured beyond recognition. The cry of the Reformers was: “Scripture Alone!” Only the sacred text of the Bible could be trusted as the rule for faith and practice. Man’s traditions, while at times of value, had to be radically submitted to the truth of the Word of God. Whatever was contrary was to be discarded. All doctrine had to be either explicit in Scripture or a necessary consequence of reasoning from the Scriptures. They were not rejecting or devaluing, however, all previous thinking. Indeed the Reformers recognized there were those who went before them to whom God had given much wisdom. They had a sense of humility as they approached the Scriptures to ascertain what was the true Biblical teaching. But, one thing was certain, no matter who held to a given interpretation or doctrine, it had to be proven by the text itself. How did one go about interpretation? Scripture is self-sufficient. Scripture interprets itself. By comparing Scripture to Scripture, by going from what is most clear and basic and then progressing to more difficult passages, one could arrive at theological truth.

We greatly need a renewed understanding of this principle today in Jewish ministry. First, most obviously, no matter what the great sages of Christianity and Judaism have said, a teaching must be derived solely from Scripture. We cannot ultimately depend on the traditions of Catholicism, the teachings of the Mishnah and Talmud, or even the beliefs of the Reformers themselves to come to truth. We can consider what has been said and done before by wise men, but we must base what we believe and what we do on the Bible alone. We have seen the Messianic Movement tossed about by every wind of doctrine circulating in the Charismatic Movement. We have also seen men claiming to be God’s prophets, even after their prophecies fail, and there have been leaders vested with authority beyond Scripture. In Jewish ministry today, there is a serious need to return to the Scriptures alone as the sole authority for faith and practice. God’s people are suffering for lack of sound teaching of the word of God.

Solo Christo - By Messiah’s Work Alone are We Saved

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Messiah Jesus, (1 Tim. 2:5) For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:13-20)

Today we hear in some circles the speculation that Jewish people can be saved through the Abrahamic Covenant and without explicit faith in Yeshua, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. This generally is not found in Jewish ministry circles, but there have been some offshoots that have begun to stress Torah more than Messiah. Certainly we have seen statements such as “National Israel is at the center of what God is doing on earth.” Wrong! *Messiah* is at the center of what God is doing on Earth! When we

place anything at the center other than Messiah himself, we begin to go astray in our thinking. One evangelistic tract I've seen proclaims Messianic Judaism. It should have proclaimed Messiah! At one Messianic conference I was asked about my theology. I said that Messiah is at the center of everything God has done. All the promises of God have their yes in him. Old Covenant believers were saved by looking forward to what Yeshua would do. We are saved by what he did. All there is to inherit is only inherited in and through him. Apart from him we have nothing and inherit nothing. My friend was astonished and clearly his spirit resonated to that idea. He said: "What do you call this wonderful Messiah centered theology?" We must stress once again that it is only through the work of Yeshua that anyone can be saved. Apart from him the wrath of God abides on all fallen men. In him we are counted righteous because of his perfect obedience of the Torah and his complete payment of sin for all who believe. Abraham's natural children have no hope at all apart from Messiah. Through him alone all the promises of God are realized and apart from him we have nothing. This must always be our message.

Sola Fide - Faith Alone

Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6) The righteous man shall live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4).

One of the most basic doctrines of the Reformation was a rediscovery that we are saved only through faith – not through tradition, not through good deeds, not through rituals, only through faith. The Reformers, however were by no means antinomians. They saw a continuing relevance to the Moral Law, summarized in the Ten commandments, as a guide for our lives. Often today among believers there is a tension. Some seem to make salvation too cheap. Just pray a prayer and you are saved. Others, seeing the abuse of cheap grace, teach one can lose one's salvation. The Reformers did not hold to the doctrine of "Eternal Security," but neither did they believe one could lose one's salvation! How is this possible? They saw the Scriptures taught that when God saves us he also sanctifies us. Salvation is a "package deal." The same sovereign God who grants us faith also grants us repentance and has predestined us to good works



John Owen

in conformity Messiah, the Second Adam. Romans 8:29-30 states: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." God no more gives faith without repentance than one can give a child one side of a

coin. Only through faith do we receive salvation, however faith is not alone. True believers persevere in the faith. But the only merit in the whole process is the merit of the Messiah. His sacrifice for sin legally secured the salvation of all who trust in him. Justification has its ground solely in the righteous life and atoning death of Messiah. Nothing can be added to our justification before God. So the Reformers were clear about salvation only through faith alone, but they also



Philip Melancthon

recognized that, if one is truly saved, one lives for the Lord, imperfectly, true, but there is a new direction in one's life towards conformity to the image of the Messiah. They recognized the value of the Moral Law as a standard and guide in life, but also were crystal clear in preaching that the Law cannot save. This is the way we must proclaim the Good News to the Jewish community. We must avoid cheap grace and we also must avoid any principle of merit on our part. How we need to recover the crystal clear preaching of salvation through faith alone in the work of Messiah alone!

Sola Gratia - Grace Alone

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Messiah Jesus our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

In the Torah is it repeatedly stressed that anyone who does any work on Yom Kippur would be cut off from his people. Why? Because the Day of Atonement, when atonement was made for Israel, was the Sabbath of Sabbaths. It was a picture of the redemption that would be provided by God through the atoning Sacrifice of Messiah. Sabbath rest is a picture of Grace alone. We can add no good works of our own to what Messiah did, as far as our standing before God and as far as salvation is concerned. We are saved by grace alone through faith. We have no merit apart from the merit of Messiah. We have no righteousness apart from the righteousness of Messiah counted in our behalf. This also means that the faith itself is a gift from God. How liberating this truth is! We ultimately depend upon God for our salvation, and for the salvation of the Jewish people! It is all up to him. It is all in his hands. It is not something we can take any credit for. No one can save himself or anyone else, for that matter. Only God can save, and that by grace alone. If we truly understand this truth there is no basis for human pride. Left to ourselves we are totally depraved, that is, evil has tainted every part of our nature. We are spiritually dead and unable and

unwilling to believe. God in his mercy unconditionally elects those who will be saved. Messiah's sacrifice secures the salvation of his people and God will complete the work he begins in his people. A renewed sense the truth of the doctrine of Grace Alone gives us confidence, hope, boldness, freedom and humility in sharing the message of Messiah. A renewed understanding of Grace Alone is essential for revival.

Soli Deo Gloria - Glory be to God Alone

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31) For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)

God is the supreme king to whom all glory goes and for whom all life is lived. This is the essence of the Ceremonial Law. The Mosaic sacred signs and symbols had this as their deeper spiritual meaning. Circumcision symbolized a heart purified and devoted to God's glory. The dietary laws, the tzitsit (fringes) on garments, the mezuzah on doorpost all were to remind the Israelite to glorify God in all areas of life. All of life is to be lived for God's glory. There is no division between the sacred and the secular. Everything belongs to God and is to be sanctified. Israel was also reminded in the Mosaic ceremonies that they were redeemed by God's power alone. The Passover was accomplished by God, not man. All glory goes to him in all things. How often we attempt to build our own kingdoms to our own glory! How easily we seek to bring glory to ourselves through what we do. The only truly pure motivation for bringing the good news to the Jewish people must be God's glory. It is out of a desire to see God glorified that we pray and work toward a restoration of the Jewish people to faith. And we know only God is able to restore Abraham's natural descendants to the family of faith. No method, no evangelistic program, no gimmick, no sort of pressure, emotional or otherwise, is able to bring people to true faith. God is the one who will graft in again the natural branches back into the olive tree of the Israel of faith. All glory goes to God in this as well.

In the five "Solas" we have a beginning. These are the doctrines of grace. These must be our foundation, but a New Reformation in Jewish ministry must go further still. In a future second part I will explore how other important Reformation principles, such as the Regulative Principle of Worship, the Covenant of Grace and Continuity of the Covenants, the Interpretation of Scripture by Scripture, and the Unity of the Word of God are extremely important in Jewish ministry. There is much to do indeed, but God is able! Let us pray he brings the needed Reformation that we may see the renewal and revival among the Jewish people that we hope for.

It is our hope and vision that CHAIM can serve some small role in helping to advance revival and renewal in Jewish ministry through bringing this perspective. There can be no revival without reformation and return to the Word of God. May the Holy One of Israel grant us hearts and minds that seek his truth.

Part 2: The Covenantal Centrality of Messiah

As we continue to investigate applying the perspective of the

Reformation to Jewish ministry, that is to say, bringing Jewish ministry into increasing Biblical conformity, we must at some point consider how the whole Bible fits together. Much error has come about through failure to understand, *in all of Scripture*, the centrality of the Messiah and the redemption he accomplished. Bad theology has led to bad practice as the unity of Scripture and the unity of God's purpose in redemption have failed to be understood.

Getting the Big Picture

The more you study the Bible, the more you are able to see great overarching themes. The basis for believing Jesus is the Messiah is not simply a few proof texts, rather it is based upon the *whole* Hebrew Bible. The coming of Messiah is *central* to God's plan of restoring a people for himself, a people brought out of sin and disobedience, a people redeemed from the Fall. Rabbinic legend speaks of Messiah waiting in the Garden of Eden, which will be restored when he comes. There is a indeed great theological insight in that legend! The restoration of mankind from the Fall is bound up with Messiah's coming. Messiah's redemption must involve restoration of all the benefits man had at Creation. There



Geerhardus Vos

is only one sort of Messiah who fits the description: Jesus, the Second Adam, as revealed in the prophesied New Covenant (Jer. 31:31). Let's briefly consider creation and redemption.

When man was created, he had life in the Garden under God's *blessing* (Gen. 1:28). Adam and Eve enjoyed a close relationship and communication with their maker (Gen. 1:28, 3:8). There was no shame (Gen. 2:25) and the heart of man was innocent (Gen. 1:27, 31; 2:25). Man resided in the Garden of Eden where there was harmony between man and man and between man and nature (Gen. 1:28). Death was unknown to man, as he had access to the Tree of Life (Gen. 2:17, 3:22).

When the Fall occurred, mankind lost the Creator's *blessing*, which was replaced by the *curse* (Gen. 3:17). We experienced separation from God. Man hid in fear and was thrown out of Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8). Shame entered our consciousness and a covering was needed (Gen. 3:7, 21). Our hearts became prone to do evil (Gen. 4:8; 6:5) and we experienced disharmony where there had been harmony. Cain killed his brother Abel, animals came to fear men, and the earth produced thorns (Gen. 3:16-18, 9:2). Sin resulted in exile from Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23), exclusion from the Tree of Life, and finally, death (Gen. 3:19, 22). Understanding the Fall is of crucial importance.

Man broke the Covenant of Works that he was created under. Hosea 6:7 tells us: “But they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.” At that point, God, in his mercy, began to deal with man redemptively through a **Covenant of Grace**. Salvation has only ever been experienced through participation in the Covenant of Grace. True, God administered this covenant differently in different times, but salvation has always been by grace through the work of Messiah. As some wise men have written:

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the Jewish people, all foreshadowing the Messiah to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament. (WCF VII:V)

Redemption in the Hebrew Bible, the Tenach, had to do with regaining what was lost in the Fall, often as represented as a promise or type. **Failure on the part of Judaism to understand the overarching purpose of God to redeem mankind from the Fall, and how the Messianic redemption is integral in this process, has caused Judaism to have no sufficient integrating principle in approaching the Hebrew Scriptures.** I once asked a prominent anti-missionary rabbi if he could tell me “in a nutshell” what is the core of what the Hebrew Bible. He was slightly taken aback, unusual for him, and responded, “We don’t think of the Bible in those terms.” No. Instead the concern among the Orthodox sometimes sadly and humorously degenerates into whether or not one can turn on a light switch or eat an egg laid on the Sabbath! But they do not know that the Sabbath was given for man and our Sabbath rest is in Messiah’s Redemption (Hebrews 4:9). We must lovingly pray for them!

How is redemption from the curse of the Fall expressed in the Tenach? Perhaps this is best understood in terms of **blessing promised**. All nations were to be blessed through seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3; 22:17-18). This is the purpose of Israel’s existence. This is the plan of God. How sad that some have wrongly divided the Word of God into “Plan A” (Israel) and “Plan B” (Messiah’s Congregation, the Church). There is only one plan, said Paul, “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to both our people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23).

In Israel’s experience, the Fall was being overturned. Abraham’s children enjoyed a closer relationship and communication with God through the Temple and through the prophets (Dt. 4:29-40). The shame of sin was covered through the Levitical atonement (covering) for sin (Leviticus 16). The hearts of God’s people were to be renewed, circumcised (Dt. 10:16, Ez. 36, Ps. 51). Harmony between man and man and between man and nature was promised (Isaiah ch. 2 & 11). The Garden of Eden was

experienced, in part, through life in the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. The meek inherited Israel (Ps. 37:11). Even death itself began to be overcome as eternal life was promised and the final resurrection was described (Daniel 12:2).

With the coming of Messiah, these things have reached a greater stage of realization. Redemption has been accomplished and is being applied. It has already come, is coming, and will come in fullness when he returns. The promised New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31) is in continuity with the Old and brings the Covenant of Grace to its fullest expression. What Messiah accomplished at his first coming is presently unfolding, and will be fully experienced when he returns. The fullness of God’s blessing and the removal of the curse comes through the Second Adam (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22). Now, through Messiah, all peoples can experience a restored relationship with their Creator God. Through Messiah we receive sonship and become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We have the Word of God dwelling in us richly. All shame is removed because Messiah has completely atoned for our sin and we are counted righteous through Him (Titus 3:3-7). In a fuller way our hearts are



Charles Hodge

circumcised and renewed (John 3:3, Colossians 2:11-12). Harmony is being restored. Messiah brings peace between man and man as Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slave and free, Arab and Israelite, worship together. Even nature itself will be renewed at his return. The ultimate Promised Land, a universal restored Garden of Eden, will be experienced in a New Heavens and Earth (Mt. 5:5, Rev. 21:1). Death is overcome because Messiah rose from dead. He restores the Tree of Life. Eternal life is now the possession of all believers (John 5:24, 1 Cor. 15).

God had a Covenant of Works with Adam at Creation which was broken. He established a Covenant of Grace which is administered in different ways until it's final expression in the Messiah, the Second Adam. **Blessing, Curse, Renewed Blessing is how the whole Bible fits together, and all that realized in the one who was born in David’s city, Bethlehem.**

All the promises of God find their “Yes” in Messiah (2 Corinthians 1:20). He has become a witness and a covenant for the peoples (Isaiah 42:6, 55:4). The one Covenant of Grace is realized through him. He obeyed the Father completely, took the punishment for our disobedience, and so fulfilled the Covenant of Works we all, in Adam, have broken. We must ground all we believe and all we do in him if we are to have a proper foundation for reforming Jewish ministry. On this solid rock we must stand. All other ground is sinking sand.

SEMPER REFORMANDA! May we continually strive to be more and more faithful; to the holy Scriptures as we reach out to the Jewish people with the Good News of Messiah!

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