

In Christ Alone
Part III of a series on the Reformation "Solas"
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This month, in honor of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, we have been exploring the major teachings emphasized during this extremely important time in history. We are focusing on what are often called "The Five Solas of the Protestant Reformation."

1. The Bible alone
2. Grace alone
3. Faith alone
4. Christ alone
5. For the glory of God alone

We are doing this not because of mere historical interest, but because these are significant themes of the Bible, and because they are important aspects of what we believe and teach here at Chisholm Baptist Church. These are truths essential to our spiritual health, as believers in and followers of, Jesus Christ. Today we focus on "Christ Alone" as the foundation for our salvation and our Christian life. Let's pause and pray the Lord would encourage and challenge us through His word this morning.

In the past two weeks, our topics have been the Bible alone as our authority, and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. There was a clear distinction between how Martin Luther and the other reformers viewed these truths, and the teaching of the Roman Catholic church at that time. When it came to Jesus Christ, however, there was substantial agreement between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Lutherans, for example, believed the church had it right, when it came to their understanding of who Jesus was/is. There was agreement that the Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, and confession of Chalcedon all reflected the Bible's teaching that Jesus was the eternal Son of God. Thus, they affirmed Jesus was fully God and fully human, one person, with two distinct natures. The Reformers did not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. They wanted to "reform the church" not destroy it, or in today's political vernacular, reform, not repeal.

Their goal was to help the church return to its biblical and apostolic roots, and be faithful to Jesus, the one whom both Protestants and Roman Catholics, *Affirmed is the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from*

true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end. That, folks, is from the Nicene Creed. As Baptists, it is not something we recite in our worship services, like is done in other denominations. That is fine, but even if we are not able to recite that Creed, we better believe it. Even though the words are not scripture, they accurately reflect what the New Testament teaches about the faith Jesus and His apostles proclaimed.

Protestants and Roman Catholics were united in their understanding of who Jesus is. They both made the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, which the Apostle Paul said, 1 Corinthians 12:3, no one can make and mean, without the Holy Spirit. So, if there was agreement on this most important of all Christian beliefs, what was the problem? If both Protestants and Roman Catholics confessed "Jesus as Lord" why could they not just be one big, happy family?

Well, the problem, at least in Luther's view, was that the church's confession of Jesus as Lord, had been compromised and confused by a sacramental system which turned people's focus to the church, instead of Christ. Yes, the church establishment believed Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Yes, they believed a Christian is to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Yes, they believed Jesus provided salvation for Christians through His death and resurrection. Yes, these truths were believed. *But* they had become obscured and lost in a complicated system of religious rituals which tended to undermine genuine faith in Jesus. So, what was the solution advocated by Luther and other Reformers? "Christ alone." That is where the focus needed to be. Not on the church, not on the sacraments, not on the Christian "religion," but on Jesus Christ. Christians needed to concentrate on one thing, on Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the

dead to guarantee our salvation. Without that focus, Luther believed, the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, was often very empty.

Now, again Luther and the other Reformers did not want to throw out the baby with the bath water. They believed God had indeed established the church, and though it is the spiritual body of Christ, the church also functions as a human organization, made up of real people. They believed God had indeed called certain individuals to be leaders in the church, and taught that Christians should submit to the pastors and elders of a church. They believed the sacraments, at least the two the Bible speaks of, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are indeed symbols of God's grace, and can be of spiritual benefit to Christian believers. Yes, being a Christian involves "religion." But, that religion should *never take the place* of the Lord Jesus. Our love and loyalty is to be directed to Christ and Christ alone. Okay, let's fast forward five hundred years, to 2017, and cross the ocean from Germany to Northern Minnesota, and think about what "Christ alone" means for those of us in this room. And folks, this is something which should be just as important to us today as it was for Martin Luther.

Number one, we need to clearly affirm that Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Unlike five hundred years ago, we have many who question that this is who Jesus is. Luther's complaint was the profession many folks made of Jesus as Lord, was merely lip service. **Isaiah 29:13** "*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*" However, in our day there are a lot of people who don't even give Jesus lip service. Some secularist types try to deny that Jesus even existed despite overwhelming historical evidence that He did. Others, acknowledge Jesus' existence, but claim, again, contrary to the evidence, that we know almost nothing about Him because the New Testament gospels are unreliable. And then there are many folks who say, yes, Jesus was a good man, a great teacher, but *was not God*. But, how could He be a good man and a great teacher if His claims about being God were wrong? That would make Him, as C. S. Lewis said, *either a liar or a lunatic*. These folks respond, against the evidence, that the early Christians exaggerated Jesus' claims to deity and embellished the accounts of His resurrection. Some of these people portray Jesus as some type of mystic and new age guru, while others depict Him as a first century political activist with a passion for social justice. They agree, however, that Jesus was not

God, and have no interest in professing Jesus Christ as Lord.

Most disturbing of all are those within the church who deny Jesus is the eternal Son of God. They often speak in some kind of theological "double speak," such as the pastor who said, "Of course, I believe in the divinity of Christ, I believe in the divinity of every human being." The reality, however, is that even though they might recite the Creeds, they simply don't believe them. They don't believe, for example, that Jesus is *of the same essence as the Father*. Or that *through Him all things were made*. I often talk about how genuine faith is not merely believing facts about Jesus and how there is a difference between believing in Jesus and just believing about Him. Yet, even though believing about Jesus is not sufficient, it is still essential. One cannot truly confess Jesus as Lord, cannot honor "Christ alone" without believing He is the eternal Son of God, fully divine and fully human, one person with two natures. That folks is not theological gibberish, it is important biblical truth which we are to believe and proclaim. If that doesn't really make sense to you, please give me a call.

Number two, we need to proclaim that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone. Unlike in Luther's day, there are many people who claim there are other paths to salvation. They reject the idea that Christ alone is the source of salvation, because they believe God will accept people who practice other religions into heaven. These folks like to use the analogy that there are different paths that lead up the mountain, but they all end up at the same destination, the peak, where God is. Jesus offers just one of numerous paths to get to the top of the mountain and experience salvation. In the 15th century both Protestants and Roman Catholics rejected the idea that salvation could be found any other way, except through Jesus. They knew the Bible clearly taught that Christ was the only way to get to heaven. Jesus Himself said **John 14:6**, *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*. In **Acts 4:11, 12** The Apostle Peter proclaims: "*For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.*"

So, again, both Protestants and Catholics were in agreement that Christ alone was the source of salvation, though they disagreed how this

salvation was experienced. That began to change in the 20th century as liberal Protestants started adopting the views of secular pluralists and declared it was narrow minded and bigoted to suggest there was only one true religion and that other religions were false. These folks embraced the “many paths to God” idea. In recent years, different folks, including some evangelicals, have adopted the idea that salvation is only through Jesus, but people who embrace other religions can still benefit from what Jesus has done for them and experience salvation. That also is apparently predominant understanding in the Roman Catholic church now. A few months ago, Pope Francis seemed to suggest that even atheists could be saved by Christ, even though they clearly do not have faith. I believe, however, and most evangelical Christians agree, that salvation comes through Christ alone, and experienced as we talked about last week, by grace, through faith alone.

I think part of the problem is folks fail to recognize how unique Jesus is and how Christianity is different from all other religions. My analogy is that there are indeed many different roads going up the mountain, but none of them reach the top. The peak of the mountain is surrounded by sheer cliffs on every side. There is another path, however, that goes down the mountain. It is the path Jesus takes from the peak down to the base where He rescues sinners like us and takes us up that path to the peak where we can be in the presence of God for all eternity. While other religions focus on how we can reach God, Christianity focuses on how God reaches down and saves us through Christ alone.

There is an old legend about a man who became lost, took an unfamiliar path, and fell into a bed of quicksand. He began crying out for help, and soon Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher, came along. He saw the man’s plight and said, “If you are wise you will learn from your experience and stay out of places like this.” Confucius went on his way, and a short time later, Buddha came by. He observed the man’s situation and said, “My friend, there is much to learn from suffering. It should not be resisted. You need to embrace becoming one with the quicksand.” As Buddha left, the man was chest deep in the sand. Within a few minutes, Mohammad arrived. He said, “I am sorry my friend, but it is obviously the will of Allah that you die today,” and he continued on his way. By now the man was barely able to keep his head above the sand to breath. Death was imminent. But then Jesus came, pulled him out of the quicksand, and saved

him. Friends, we say our salvation is in Christ alone, because Jesus is the only one who can and will save us.

Number three, we must not obscure the truth of “Christ alone.” People can still get confused, when the church focuses on anything other than Jesus.” Let me start with a word to any Roman Catholic friends who might be listening. I am not interested in getting into a debate with you about theological issues such as whether there are seven sacraments or two, or whether the bread and wine actually became the body and blood of Christ. I simply have one question. Are you trusting in Jesus Christ to save you or are you trusting in the church to save you? Is your faith in “Christ alone” and do you confess Jesus alone as Lord and Savior? If your answer is “I am trusting in Jesus Christ, not the church. My faith is in Christ alone,” then we are good. We can talk about all sorts of theological issues another time, but we are in agreement on the most important truth of all. However, if your answer is “I guess I am trusting in the church” or, “I am trusting in both” or, “I think trusting in the church is the same as trusting in Jesus,” or vice-versa, then I fear you may be confused. Jesus is not the church, and the church is not Jesus. Yes, Christ is the head of the church, and the church is His body, but it was Jesus, not the church, who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead to guarantee our salvation. That is why **Romans 10:9** says, *If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* It is faith in Jesus, not faith in the church.

Now, I need to be fair, and acknowledge it is not just the Roman Catholic church which sometimes obscures the truth that “Christ alone” is the source of our salvation and should be the objective of our love and loyalty. Sometimes Protestant churches give the impression that getting baptized or being a church member are just as important as trusting in Jesus. Other times churches emphasize keeping the rules, “Don’t drink, smoke, chew or go with girls who do,” more than they acknowledge and honor Jesus as Lord. Some churches focus on spiritual experiences such as speaking in tongues, or just “feeling close to God.” Are these things wrong? No, not necessarily. But they become a problem when they begin to confuse people by causing them to think the heart of Christianity is something other than acknowledging Jesus as Lord and honoring Him in every way we can.

Number four, we must keep the focus on Jesus, not ourselves. Perhaps the most common obstacle to focusing on Christ alone is a focus on self. This focus on self pervades our culture which is engulfed in narcissism, and I suspect this happens in all denominations. However, I fear it is very prevalent in Baptist and Evangelical churches like ours. That is evident as I listen to different folks describe their Christian experience. For example, my friend Joe, who you have not met, tells me, “Dan, since I started reading the Bible every day, I have really been able to turn my life around.” Now, that statement may be a reflection of a wonderful reality. Praise God that Joe’s life is being transformed in a positive way. Yet, it is a confusing statement, at least if you desire is to honor Christ as Lord. Why? Because it is a statement which glorifies, not Jesus, but self. Since “*I*” started reading the Bible, “*I* have been able to turn my life around.” Now, you might be thinking, “Pastor Dan you are being kind of picky. I am sure Joe didn’t intend to make it seem all about himself.” No, he probably didn’t. His attitude may be very honoring to the Lord. My point is that his words are confusing. And words like that can keep us from focusing on Christ alone and giving Him the glory He deserves.

This happens sometimes even when we tell others about our experience of God’s salvation. For example, I hear people say things like “I know I am saved because I prayed a prayer to receive Jesus when I was twelve years old.” Or, “I will be in heaven some day because two years ago I went forward in an evangelistic meeting.” Now, listen carefully so you don’t misunderstand. No one ever will be saved because he prayed a prayer. No one will ever be in heaven because she went forward in a meeting. *We are saved because of Jesus Christ!* We will be in heaven because Jesus died for our sins and His righteousness has been credited or imputed to us. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, *in Christ alone*. Yes, that salvation is received through faith. Praying a prayer or going forward in a meeting might be how that faith is expressed and thus can be very good and important. But the focus must never be on what we have done, but always on what Jesus has done for us.

“But Pastor Dan, it seems you are just quibbling over words again. Someone who says he is saved ‘because he prayed a prayer’ probably understands he is saved because of Jesus.” Maybe so. I am very thankful that our salvation does not depend on saying the right words or explaining everything the right way. But, if we know we are saved because of Jesus, if we know the reason we will be in heaven one day is because Jesus died on the cross in our place, *why don’t we say that?*

It might be good for us to say what the great 19th century Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon said, “The only thing I have contributed to my salvation, is the sin from which I need to be saved.” Salvation is from Christ alone. Whenever we give the impression that becoming a Christian or being a Christian or growing as a Christian is primarily because of something we do, rather than what Christ has done, we are confusing people. “Christ alone” is a truth we never want to obscure.

Friends, at our deacon retreat a few years ago, I asked this question: When you think of Chisholm Baptist Church, what is the first thing that comes to mind? The answers included “People loving and caring for each other” and “A commitment to teaching the Bible,” “Many opportunities to grow as Christians.” The thing that seemed a little strange is no one mentioned Jesus. I do remember Pastor Mark said something about focusing on the gospel which is about Jesus. Yet, no one said Chisholm Baptist Church is a place where people trust, love and follow Jesus Christ. That is what we are about. Now, don’t misunderstand. The other things mentioned are true and important. And those deacons are some of the finest men I have ever known, all who I am confident trust, love and follow Jesus. And I know they will forgive me for bringing up this slightly embarrassing illustration. My point is that it is easy to get caught up with good things, really good things, and forget what is the best thing of all. At Chisholm Baptist Church, we want to be about Jesus. Christ alone has saved us, Christ alone is our reason for living, Christ alone is our source of hope and joy, even in darkest days of our lives. “In Christ alone, my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song.”