

THE SOLAS OF THE REFORMATION

ii. Solus Christus / Solo Christo – Christ Alone or by/through Christ Alone Colossians 1:15-22, Philippians 3:10-14

It was 500 years ago that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg¹ launching what became known as the Reformation². If you were here last week you would have heard that we are looking at what have become known as the five “solas” of the reformation. These are:

- [Sola scriptura \("by Scripture alone"\)](#)
- [Sola fide \("by faith alone"\)](#)
- [Sola gratia \("by grace alone"\)](#)
- [Solus Christus or Solo Christo \("Christ alone" or "through Christ alone"\)](#)³
- [Soli Deo gloria \("glory to God alone"\)](#)

Alan commenced last Sunday by looking at “Grace alone”. And he said this:

Grace is “not simply a theological concept to discuss and debate, grace is the means whereby we start, continue and finish our faith journey on earth and beyond.”⁴

As we look at “By Christ alone” this morning I want to continue with the picture of our faith journey and how we are to respond to the five solas. And I want to look at this:

- against the context in which Luther found himself;
- the supremacy of Christ; and
- our response.

The context in which Luther found himself

¹ You can find a translation of the 95 theses by following this article: <https://www.uncommon-travel-germany.com/martin-luther-95-theses.html>

² (31 October 1517) is exactly 500 years since Martin Luther famously (or, for exacting historians: reputedly) nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg's Schlosskirche, turning a rumbling religious rift into a roaring ecclesiastical schism and starting what became to be known as the Reformation. Without Luther, the course of history would be unrecognisable. Yet without Wittenberg, a hive of pioneering intellectual debate in late-medieval Europe and a prosperous power centre of the Holy Roman Empire, Luther would neither have developed his rebellious ideas nor enjoyed the political support to propagate them against the long arm of the papacy. See article at: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/31/wittenberg-spotlight-500-years-reformation-martin-luther#img-1>

³ Christ alone is the only sola rendered in two different ways, either Solus Christus (nominative case meaning Christ is the ground of our justification), or, solo Christo (ablative case like the other Solas indicating instrumental means as in “by Christ alone,” or “through Christ alone.”). Thus justification can be said to be by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone (Solus Christus) or through Christ alone (solo Christo).

⁴ Alan also said: “Unless God in his grace gives us a new heart in Christ, the addictive nature of sin enslaves the human will. The only way in which we can change is when we discover, or re-discover, the revolutionary nature of grace, personified in Christ.”

At the time when Luther raised his challenges Rome was preaching Jesus plus. Jesus plus the saints, plus the good works of the saints, plus the good works of the believers, and plus Mary as mediator. And Rome was selling indulgences, offering salvation, advancement and forgiveness for sale at a price to be paid to the church.⁵ There was no preaching Jesus and Him alone for salvation, sufficient to meet all of salvation's requirements.

When Luther first sensed feared for his life he is recorded as having cried out "O Mary help!" And the second time a few years later when in a frightening thunderstorm "Save me, St. Anne, and I'll become a monk!" Which he then did.

Years later he is said to have reflected in a sermon: "St Anne was my idol." And he went on to say the "truth of the human heart is that it is easier for us humans to believe and trust in everything else than in the name of Christ, who alone is all in all..."

Church tradition had been expanded to the point where the role of the scriptures had diminished. The emphasis on merit and works had blurred the true meaning of faith and grace and so in the reformation the emphasis was placed on "scripture over tradition, faith over works, and grace over merit" each intended to be a departure from what was being preached and practiced in Rome.

It is said that the verses in Romans that changed Luther's life and the world were:⁶

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

¹⁷For 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."

By grace through the power of God comes a righteousness through faith from first to last. Not by indulgences, not by Papal edict, not by merit or by works.

And relying on the scriptures and Christ alone Luther faced the might of Rome. When called on to repent he said that he would not unless he could be shown to be wrong

⁵ Luther no. 21 of the 95 theses: "21. Therefore, those preachers of indulgences err who say that, by the Pope's indulgence, a man may be exempt from all punishments, and be saved."

⁶ Romans 1:16-17. Verse 17 quoting from Habakkuk. 2:4.

by "Scripture and plain reason". And through all his trials and tribulations he held and preached Christ as central and Christ as sufficient:⁷

"For the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart ... is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom, unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night."

Christ at the centre of all. Not Christ plus: but Christ alone.

The context today is different but we live in times where there are major challenges to the concept of the sufficiency of Christ alone. In fact in terms of the post-modern concept of tolerance you will be held to be intolerant by many when you pronounce that Christ is the way the truth and the life and the only way to God.⁸ Traditions and rituals abound. Blessings for sale are still with us. ⁹

The supremacy of Christ

If ever you start wondering about the supremacy of Christ read and re-read the passage from Colossians¹⁰ that has just been read for us this morning. Let us have a look at the passage which starts with the words:

"15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

Jesus came to be with us that we may know God. "Emmanuel" – God with us. In John¹¹ we read that Jesus said:

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

⁷ Luther writes in his commentary on Galatians. See: A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A revised and completed translation based on the "Middleton" edition of the English version of 1575 (Logos Bible Software), 16.

⁸ John 14:6. "6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know[b] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁹ Forbes publishes a list of the richest pastors. See: <http://dailypost.ng/2017/07/31/seven-nigerians-make-list-top-20-world-richest-pastors-see-list/>. The richest has amassed wealth of US\$ 1.1 billion.

¹⁰ [Colossians 1:15-22](#)

¹¹ John 14:8-11. "8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."

God transcendent and God immanent. And then:

"16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."

Paul mentions seven times in a few verses the words "all creation", "all things" and "everything" stressing that Christ is supreme. In time he was there at the beginning and he is the glue holding all together.

"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

He is the head of the body of believers and of the church. Supreme in the beginning and supreme in the end. The Alpha and the Omega.¹²

The fullness of God dwelling in Jesus. The fullness here being the totality of God with all his powers and attributes.¹³

And through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God ended the alienation of men and women from God. Reconciliation through the blood of Christ so that believers are presented "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation".

All of this through Christ and through Christ alone.

These verses stress not only the supremacy of Christ but summarise the full Gospel message¹⁴.

- God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge;
- We have all sinned against Him, offending His holy character, alienating ourselves from Him, and exposing ourselves to His righteous anger;

¹² Revelation 22:13. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

¹³ Footnote to verse 19 in NIV Study Bible at page 1816

¹⁴ "So how do we begin positively? For starters, put yourself in the background, and preach Christ crucified. Clarify what the true Gospel is; what the required response is, and what it means to be a Christian. Make sure people know that God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge; that we have all sinned against Him, offending His holy character, alienating ourselves from Him, and exposing ourselves to His righteous anger; that He has sent Christ to die the death that we deserved for our sins; that Christ's death and resurrection is the only way to be reconciled to the one true God; and that we must respond to this Good News by repenting of our sins and believing in the Gospel if we would be forgiven by God, reconciled to Him, and saved from the wrath to come. Make sure people know that they must persevere in a lifestyle of repentance and belief, displaying an increasingly loving and holy lifestyle that proves that we are His disciples. (John 15:8; cf. Matt 7:15-23; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13; 1 John 3:14; 4:8)". Extract from: The Deliberate Church: Mark Dever and Paul Alexander. P44, middle paragraph.

- God sent Christ to die the death that we deserved for our sins;
- Christ's death and resurrection is the only way to be reconciled to the one true God; and
- We must respond to this Good News by repenting of our sins and believing in the Gospel if we would be forgiven by God, reconciled to Him, and saved from the wrath to come.

Our response

How do we respond? The starting point is that it is by grace through faith that we have been saved¹⁵.

“⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Luther taught that we are saved by grace through faith and that this yields good works.

What is important is that we are to respond to us being created to do the good works that God has prepared for us. In this sense being saved is not the destination in your journey of faith. It is certainly an important station in your journey, but it is not the end point.

Sue and I travelled in Greece by train. When we got to the main station in Athens we were told this was the metamorphosa. We and the other passengers had to stop and to change there. It wasn't the end of our journey. We were still journeying on. But at that point of the journey we had to change. And I find this a useful illustration. Being saved follows when we confess our failings and accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour¹⁶.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁶ Romans 10:9-10

“9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

At that point you are to change and the life that you lead needs to reflect that change as respond to what has been done for you.

An author¹⁷ drew my attention to the fact that we tend think of Solo Christo as a doctrine for when we get saved, that is, past tense. And he points to three passages that refer to the past, present and future. Listen to these verses (Paul to Timothy, the Corinthians and the Romans:

“9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time”¹⁸

“18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”¹⁹

“9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”²⁰

The being saved currently and the being saved in the future are to take place as we journey on. This is referred to sometimes as our sanctification. And Solus Christus has everything to do with this continuing journey.

Michael Horton writes this:²¹

“The righteousness that alone will withstand God’s judgment always remains Christ’s rather than the believer’s. Therefore, even in our sanctification we must look outside of ourselves and cling to Christ alone, realizing more and more

¹⁷ Corey McLaughlin. See: <https://www.adventchristianvoices.com/?category=systematic+theology>

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 1:9

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:18

²⁰ Romans 5:9-10

²¹ Michael Horton writing in Union With Christ. https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=union+with+christ+michael+horton&rh=n%3A283155%2Ck%3Aunion+with+christ+michael+horton

each day the effects of the fact that we have been declared righteous in Christ and that we have been baptized by the Spirit into his death and raised with him in life.” (Underlining added).

What does this mean for you and for me? It means that you are to “...continue and finish your faith journey on earth and beyond” through grace and through Christ alone.

You are to journey on responding to the gospel message at every stage of your Christian journey and getting a little older is no excuse. In Joshua²² we read:

13 When Joshua had grown old, the Lord said to him, “You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.”

And he was then told you are still to take over all of the land of the Philistines and Geshurites, the Canaanites and all of Lebanon. Getting a little older is no excuse.

Paul's passage to the Philippians that we read this morning²³ must be our model and manual.

“10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

And then Paul encourages us and gives us a picture.

Paul says: I have not obtained all of this. I have not arrived at my destination in this my journey of faith. But I press on to take hold of what Christ has done for me. I don't dwell on what is behind me. I don't let sin entangle me and hold me back²⁴ but I strain forward for the prize. Not just a wreath of leaves and maybe some cash, but

²² Joshua 13:1-5. 2 “This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites, 3 from the Shihor River on the east of Egypt to the territory of Ekron on the north, all of it counted as Canaanite though held by the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron; the territory of the Avvites 4 on the south; all the land of the Canaanites, from Arah of the Sidonians as far as Aphek and the border of the Amorites; 5 the area of Byblos; and all Lebanon to the east, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.

²³ [Philippians 3: 10-14](#)

²⁴ Footnote on verse 13 in NIV Study Bible page 1809

the award of everlasting glory found not in this life but in heaven, because Christ is there.

Be encouraged and be bold as your journey continues with Christ alone as your guide, Lord and Saviour!

And here is a challenge - from The Message Colossians 2: 6-10: 6-7 My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him. You're deeply rooted in him. You're well-constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving. 8-10 Watch out for people who try to dazzle you with big words and intellectual double-talk. ... But that's not the way of Christ. Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly. You don't need a telescope, a microscope, or a horoscope to realize the fullness of Christ, and the emptiness of the universe without him. When you come to him, that fullness comes together for you, too. His power extends over everything.

Gordon Hay
Trinity, Lynnwood
Sunday 12th November 2017