

October 22, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Five Solas
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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SOLUS CHRISTUS

John 14:6

A third foundational truth upon which the Reformation stood and moved forward is that salvation is through Christ alone. Sometimes this is stated as in the title of our sermon, “Christ alone.” Sometimes it is stated with the Latin phrase Solo Christo which means through Christ alone.

The Reformers reacted to the abuses of the organized church in their day. The Church that had begun with Christ’s commission and instruction had long departed from that instruction even as Jesus Christ warned the seven churches in Asia at the beginning of the Revelation to Saint John. In place of teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, the church leaders taught and preached a gospel that exalted the religious organization and its leaders. In the place of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, and by grace alone, they substituted salvation by faith plus works.

The abandonment of the true gospel has resulted in a world full of false religions that lead many people to believe that salvation is no big deal. Even people who think about the need to be right with God in the end, often conclude that Jesus really did die on the cross to forgive sins and because of His sacrifice everyone will ultimately be saved. That is called the heresy of universalism.

In fact, the Bible does teach universalism. It teaches that every person born in human flesh is universally born in sin and universally in need of salvation. But Scripture also teaches exclusivism regarding attainment of salvation. Exclusivism (in Christianity) refers to the fact that orthodox Christian doctrine maintains that only faith in the Jesus Christ of the Bible leads to salvation or heaven. Christianity is exclusive in that its teachings indicate that the faith of other sects or

religions will not lead to eternal life; or in other words, that Jesus Christ is the only true way to God.

This is contrary to today’s pluralistic environment, which would suggest that, as in the old saying “all roads lead to Rome,” so all faiths indeed lead to God. Universalism does not deny the person and work of Jesus Christ. It teaches that because Jesus Christ offered the sacrifice of Himself that paid the penalty for sin, every sinner’s sins have been atoned for. The Universalist will actually argue this point from Scripture. For example, they point out that Paul speaks of Jesus “*Who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time*” (1 Timothy 2:6). Or, “*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2).

Jesus explained the meaning of those verses as He often taught the exclusive nature of salvation. It is as He taught Nicodemus the teacher, “*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God*” (John 3:17-18). Jesus taught that failure to have faith in Christ alone results in certain condemnation. The Reformers taught the same truth of exclusivism: Salvation is through faith in Christ alone. It is still a critical truth in our world that presents a plethora of objects of faith that cannot offer salvation from sin.

Objects of Faith for Salvation According to Human Wisdom.

For centuries, one of the most obvious counterfeit objects of faith has been the Roman Catholic Church. As might be expected from the sly adversary of truth, Satan, the church offers teaching that sounds quite like truth. For example, the church teaches the need for “actual grace” which it defines as “A supernatural help of God for salutary [beneficial] acts granted in consideration of the merits of Christ” (Catholic Encyclopedia, “Actual Grace”). The Roman church teaches that when actual grace is working on a person, he is then able to have faith which is necessary for salvation.

Okay. We who love God and the Bible would agree that faith that comes through God's grace is necessary for salvation. That is what the Reformers meant by "Sola Fide." But this faith taught by the Roman church is not a simple faith in Christ's work on the cross, so that we are justified by faith alone in Christ's work alone. The Bible clearly teaches, *And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (Romans 4:5)*. And, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)*. And as Paul argued to the Christians in Galatia: *Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16)*.

On the contrary, according to Catholicism, the faith that is necessary for salvation must be a faith that also affirms what the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Luther pointed out that faith in Christ plus faith in the church was heresy.

Second, the organized, visible church at the time of the Reformation taught the need for baptism in order to be saved. They taught that once grace has done its work and the sinner believes Scripture and the teachings of the church, baptism is required. They taught that in baptism, sins are removed so that the sinner is justified before God. So their official teaching was, "Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It has been granted us through baptism" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par.2020).

Third, the Roman church continues to teach the need for good works in order to be saved. According to Roman Catholicism, once a person is baptized and his original sin is removed, he must perform good works because they are also necessary for salvation. So their writings declare that the mission of bishops is "teaching all peoples, preaching the Gospel to every creature so that all men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism, and the observance of the Commandments" (CCC 2068).

The Reformers' central point of contention against the organized church was this teaching that good works were required for salvation. That error led to the teachings and traditions of the church regarding the seven sacraments that virtually became the object of

faith. Those sacraments are baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, confession, last rites (or healing), taking on the holy orders, and marriage in and with the approval of the Catholic Church.

The Reformers argued that the Bible is very clear that faith in works is not valid for salvation. Rather, faith in Christ alone is the means for eternal life. But what the Reformers fought against in the Roman Church is the same error in virtually all false religions.

Mormonism, for example, denigrates Jesus by teaching that He is a separate and individual god, not one with the Father. They teach that Jesus was born as a mortal to a mortal woman but through an immortal father—not the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they must also conclude that salvation cannot be attained through Christ alone. So their teaching states that we are saved by grace, after doing all we can do (Book of Mormon, 2nd Nephi 25:23). That is to misunderstand grace. Bruce McConkie, one of their teachers claimed: "Jesus kept the commandments of his Father and thereby worked out his own salvation, and also set an example as to the way and the means whereby all men may be saved" (The Mortal Messiah, Vol.4, p.434).

What kind of works do the Mormons recommend in order to gain salvation? Baptism for the dead, marriage in and approved by the temple, keeping the whole law (their interpretation of the law), and plural marriage in order to attain the fullness of salvation. Obviously, current laws of the land make this last good work difficult to achieve. Stay tuned. Such laws are changing quickly.

Islam, the fastest growing religion in the world, also teaches that salvation is gained apart from Jesus whom they denigrate. They teach that Jesus was a prophet almost as important as Mohammed. He definitely is not equal with Allah. Worse is the fact that they teach that Jesus really did not die on the cross. Rather it only appeared that the Jews killed Allah's messenger.

Therefore, salvation according to Islam is gained wholly apart from Jesus. On the one hand, the Quran teaches that salvation is based on purification by good deeds (Quran 7:6–9). This means that a Muslim can become righteous through prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and living according to the Quran. On the other hand, the Quran also teaches that Allah has predetermined every person's destiny, and one's righteous acts may or may not affect Allah's decision (Quran 57:22). It also teaches that everyone, both the righteous and the

unrighteous, will be led into hell by Allah, before the righteous will enter heaven (Quran 19:67–72). Therefore, no Muslim can know his or her eternal destiny in this life. According to their “Bible,” even Muhammad himself was unsure of his salvation (Quran 31:34; 46:9).

What about the Jehovah’s Witnesses? They teach that Jesus was the perfect man—but no more than a man. He was definitely not God in the flesh. He was just a man who was a spirit being. Somehow He was Michael the Archangel who became Messiah at His baptism.

Therefore, according to the Watchtower teaching, salvation is not through Christ alone. Christ’s death on the cross made salvation possible. However, the object of faith is not the person and work of Christ but the teachings of the Watchtower Society. By following that teaching, a sinner can make himself/herself worthy of salvation.

Even Arminian Protestantism, with which we are all familiar, is often guilty of minimizing the work of Christ. Arminianism teaches that Jesus is God in the flesh come to redeem sinners through His sacrifice. Of course, that is what the Bible teaches! And Arminianism teaches that sinners are born again through God’s grace plus works. Plus works? Yes, they say that while Jesus shed His blood to pay for sin, individual works are also required to attain salvation. That is no different than Mormonism! What works? They teach that faith is a work of human origin. They teach that baptism is a work required to wash away sins. Furthermore, they teach that good works maintain salvation so that failure to continue good works results in loss of salvation. And with some of them, works of faith are necessary to get back the salvation that was lost.

These examples serve to illustrate the problem of virtually all religion that is contrary to the gospel. They teach that Christ alone is not the means for salvation.

So what did Martin Luther conclude about such things. He learned from the Bible that salvation cannot be attained through good works. He argued that salvation, justification, being declared righteous cannot be attained by even the strongest faith in such works. Rather salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. The Catholic Church taught that we are saved by the merits of Christ and the saints, and that we approach God through Christ, the saints, and Mary, who all pray and intercede for us. The Reformers responded,

“No, we are saved by the merits of Christ Alone, and we come to God through Christ Alone.”

Listen to Luther’s conclusions on the matter. He said, “*Man should do good works. But not trust in them.*” He taught, “*By the grace of God, we know that we are justified through faith in Christ alone. We do not mingle law and grace, faith and works. We keep them far apart. Let every true Christian mark the distinction between law and grace, and mark it well.*” Commenting on the statement in Romans 5:1-2, (“*Through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith . . .*”) Luther concluded, “*He first directs himself against the arrogance of those who believe that they have access to God without Christ, just as though their mere believing would suffice for salvation. They want to have access to God by faith, yet not through Christ, but past Christ, just as though they had no need of Christ.*” In his commentary on Galatians 2:15-16 Luther wrote: “*God never gave to any man grace and everlasting life for the merit of congruence or worthiness. These disputations of the schoolmen are nothing else but vain toys and dreams of idle brains, to no other end and purpose but to draw men from the true worship of God.*”

In one of the scenes in the classic black and white movie about Martin Luther, we see Luther arguing with his teacher and mentor who brought him to Wittenberg University to teach. Luther proclaims that salvation cannot be gained by keeping the traditions of the church and by putting faith in relics. The teacher responded, “Dr. Martin, if you sweep away all good works, all these things you dismiss as mere practice, what will you put in their place?” Luther replied, “Christ. Man only needs Jesus Christ.” He learned this from the Bible.

Jesus taught, “I am the way.”

Jesus taught His followers, like us: “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.*” Thomas said to him, “*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*” Jesus said to him, “*I am the way, and the truth, and*

the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:1-6).

Clearly implied in this statement is the fact that everyone needs to come to the Father. This is because universally everyone is condemned. Remember Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus: *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).* The words *condemned already* is a fearful statement.

To be condemned is to be singled out and ruled against. To be condemned is to have a conclusion drawn about you based on evidence. The word pictures a courtroom setting where the evidence has been heard, the judge has considered it, and pronounces the sentence: “Sir you will be separated from society through incarceration for twenty years because of your crime.” The big and critical difference is that in this statement to the Teacher of Israel, Jesus referred to eternal condemnation.

The second use of the verb (in the phrase, *but whoever does not believe is condemned already*) appears as a perfect tense passive voice. Therefore, it must speak of being condemned at some time in the past with continuing results. It is an eternal matter and it is our default condition. Eternal condemnation is full and complete separation from God based on the evidence of sin against us.

It is a fearful judgment which we cannot even imagine because we have never experienced the absence of God. Based on Bible descriptions, when God is absent, there is only incredible suffering that causes unceasing weeping, wailing, and grinding of teeth. Ultimately, it is like living forever in a lake burning with fire and sulfur. What could possibly demand such terrible condemnation from God our Creator?

Condemnation is the result of not having faith in the name of the unique Son of God. Jesus told Nicodemus that the sinner is condemned *because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).* The name of the unique Son of God includes a lot. Is Jesus God the Son and one with God the Father as He claimed? Did Jesus come from heaven to earth to take on human flesh in order to live perfectly according to God’s law as a human? Did Jesus die on the cross, shedding His blood to pay the penalty for sin? Did Jesus

rise from the dead and ascend to heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father, pleading for His people? That, and much more, is the essence of the name of the unique Son of God.

Why is it necessary to believe all that? To admit that Jesus paid the penalty for my sin is to admit I have offended my Creator. To trust that Jesus’ sacrifice is sufficient to pay for my sins is to acknowledge that I cannot pay for them myself. To believe that Jesus is at the Father’s right hand is to admit that we can approach our Creator. Why do we need to get to the Heavenly Father? We need to come to the Father to have Him dismiss our guilt.

Only the Heavenly Father can dismiss the condemnation. God the Father represents the Triune God in this case. In the beginning God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created all that is. How does the Bible begin? *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).* That title translated “God” is the Hebrew word *Eloheim*. It is a plural form as would be expected of the word most of the time.

However, as we continue on in the beginning words of the Bible we read, *And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2b).* Oh! There was God in plural form and there was the Holy Spirit, part of the Godhead, present. Read on and learn, *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26a).* Who was “us”? God the Father and God the Spirit at the very least.

But we also know from other Scripture that God the unique Son was involved in Creation. John taught us in the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).* Who is this “Word”? It is the Christ, the unique Son of God. We know that because Paul wrote, *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16).*

This is a very important, foundational truth. Because, the triune God created all things and all people, all people are responsible to honor Him. It is as Solomon concluded, *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the*

whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But in fact, we all by nature do the exact opposite. We willfully sin against God. We are guilty of breaking all of God's commandments because we honor and respect ourselves and fellow humans above God. God is right to condemn every person for eternity because we do not honor Him as God.

Therefore, only God can dismiss the condemnation. Only God who decreed the righteous condemnation for sinning against Him can "undecree" it. But how can He do that? Is God a whimsical, capricious ogre similar to the other gods created out of human imagination? Is God like us, unjust and unfair? It is not unusual in the face of tragedies like the multiple hurricanes that have smashed the Caribbean Islands, or the mass shooting in Las Vegas, or the wild fires in California that are destroying hundreds of homes, to hear people lash out at God. "What kind of God would allow such suffering?" they want to know. When I hear responses like that, I wonder what those particular individuals thought about God before the disaster struck. Did they even think about God at all? Did they ever consider that because God is their Creator, they are responsible to submit to Him? Sinful people will not hesitate to condemn God for dismissing the condemnation of only some people.

We return to the pressing question, "How can God remove the condemnation from us who rightly deserve it for offending Him?" God can righteously dismiss condemnation because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, God the unique Son. Jesus is the only way to a right standing with God.

Hear Jesus' testimony on the matter according to our text. Peter wondered where Jesus was going. Jesus told him that He was returning to the Heavenly Father. Thomas wondered what is the way to God. *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6)*. That statement establishes a critical truth. You cannot have your condemnation commuted unless you can approach God the Heavenly Father who is the Eternal Judge. You cannot approach the Judge because your offenses against Him predispose Him against you. You must have a friend or acquaintance of the Eternal Judge take you to Him. Your Friend is Jesus who will clothe you in clean garments acceptable to His Father, your Creator.

Jesus can do this, He can take you to the Judge to be made right, because of what He is. He is the way. There are not multiple ways to approach God. There is only one way and it is difficult and strict. The only way to the Eternal Judge with whom we must find favor is Jesus hanging on the cross.

Furthermore, Jesus can do this because He is the truth. There are not various acceptable truths. There are not even variant interpretations of truth. Jesus is the living truth – hear Him. He speaks through the entire Bible to make the truth known. The slightest falsehood bars entrance to the Judge and leaves us condemned for eternity.

And, Jesus can take us to the Father because He is the life. As we have already determined, Jesus as the Creator is the author of all physical life. But, Jesus is also the author of spiritual life. Jesus illustrated how the seed must be put in the ground and die in order to bring forth life. As we sinners die to ourselves, our dreams, our ambitions, our plans to gain eternal life, Jesus gives us life through the gospel. He is as Paul described Him to Timothy: *Our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10)*.

We who need to be made right with God the Eternal Judge are brought to Him through Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way. That is the story of the gospel. We should rejoice in the exclusivity of the gospel. Rejoice because we are not responsible to determine the requirements for salvation. If you were responsible, what would be your criteria? Would your criteria change throughout life? Surely we would not trust another person or a religious organization to determine the requirements for salvation? But most people do.

We should rejoice in the gospel because we can rest with assurance that our works are not sufficient to gain salvation. *He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness (Titus 3:5a)*. Therefore, we can rest in Jesus' work of mercy in our behalf. Hear the rest of that statement Paul made to Titus about our works not being sufficient for salvation: *But according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5b-6)*.

We are saved, born again, regenerated because Jesus is merciful—not condemning us as we deserve. We are truly changed because of the miracle of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. A real and serious change takes place in the sinner’s life when he or she becomes a saint. But no amount or manner of good works or beliefs in creeds can bring about that sainthood. We are saved by fixing our complete trust and dependance on Jesus Christ alone. He alone has accomplished the task of paying the penalty for sin. We alone who fully trust Him can be confident of eternal life.