

Solo Christo

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Preacher: Jason Webb

- [0:00] Well, we're going through a series on Reformation theology. It's the solas of the Reformation. And we have five solas.
- And I think it does need to be said that in some way, like the five points of Calvinism, the solas of Reformation are more of a historical synthesis, more of a historical summary than precisely how the Reformers themselves talked about it.
- Calvin didn't say, okay, here's my theology. This is what the Bible teaches about salvation in English. It spells the acronym TULIP.
- And we begin with total depravity. He didn't talk about it exactly like that. Calvin didn't even know English, so he wouldn't have had an acronym that's so wonderful in English.
- And Luther didn't say, now here is my theology. Point number one is Scripture alone. Point number two is faith alone and so on. Those are exactly what they taught.
- [1:06] But as we look back and as we summarize them, that's what we're doing here. The closest thing I think Luther had to a summary, we saw this two weeks ago, he said this.
- If we were to summarize theology, it was this. And it's another sola. And he says, *crux sola est nostra theologia*, which is just Latin for the cross alone is our theology.
- The cross alone is our theology. And it was, it is, it was the cross just by itself that drove his whole theology.
- And so the cross was the salvation of God. It was what God had done. It was the power of God. It was the wisdom and righteousness of God. That's what we see in 1 Corinthians.
- And it was the lens through which he looked and interpreted all of Scripture. So for him, for Luther especially, but for all Christian theologians, theology is cross-shaped.
- [2:16] It's cruciform. And so it was grace alone. Because we didn't contribute anything to the cross.
- We didn't contribute anything to the cross except for the sin that made it necessary. And it's faith alone because the cross is outside of us.
- It's not something that we do or did. It's not something that we make real or anything like that. It is on its own. It's not something we've cobbled together.
- And it's not this inward-looking thing that we rely upon. We don't hope to have the cross formed in us and look upon ourselves. No, it's...
- Remember, we looked at this last week. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3, Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes, believes in Him, may have eternal life.
- [3:21] And because the cross is outside of us, and because the cross is what God has done to save sinners, the only response is to look and to live, to believe. And so it's faith alone.
- It's no mixture. It's not inward-looking at all. We don't look for good things in ourselves. We look completely to the cross. And so because it's all of grace, it's all of faith.

And because it's all of faith, it's all of grace. And because it's all of faith and all of grace, it's all Christ alone. Reformation theology, those three things, especially of grace alone, and faith alone, and Christ alone, they're sort of like a woman or a girl's braided hair.

There's those three strands, and they form one braid. They go together. You can't pull one apart without pulling apart the whole thing. They hang together.

And that's a good picture of Reformation theology. Grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, they all go together. And because each one of them is true, they're all true.

[4 : 31] Because it's all Christ, my only response is faith. And because it's all Christ, it's grace alone. Because he's God's gift to us.

So this morning, my job is to tease out just this one strand of Christ alone. Christ alone.

And immediately, I run into a problem. And the problem is the same sort of problem that you have when you're trying to drink out of a fire hose. It's not like we can turn to one passage and say, see, here it is.

It just says it's Christ alone. The problem is, this is the whole Bible. The whole Bible. Starting in Genesis 3, the hope, the faith, was looking forward to this coming person.

And where it begins is where it ends. And the whole thing, every page whispers its name. And so where, the question is, as I sat down and thought about this, is where do I begin?

[5 : 37] I could begin with Isaiah. I could begin with Moses. I could begin with Colossians. I could begin with Revelation. I could begin with the gospel stories. I could begin with what Jesus said about himself.

I could begin with what the angels said about Jesus. I could begin with what God himself said about Jesus. God the Father said about him.

Because salvation is all of him. He did it. He accomplished it. And so where should we begin? Well, this is rather arbitrary, but I have been reading the gospel of John in my devotions.

And so that's where I decided to begin. So take your Bibles and turn to John chapter 1. John chapter 1. And really, to get a feel for the whole passage and to get the emphasis, the weight of it, I would have to read the whole thing and I don't have time for that.

And so really, homework assignment is just read John chapter 1 and answer the question of who is the star of this chapter?

[6 : 52] What is this chapter all about? Who's the main character? What does it say about him? So this morning, we just are going to have the highlights.

And the point is, it's Christ alone that he brings about our salvation and it's faith in him alone that justifies us. He's the star of the show.

So who is our Savior? Where does our faith rest? Well, let's just read the first four verses. Very familiar. In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

And him was life. And that life was the light of men. So where's our...

[7 : 52] Who has life? He does. Who gives us light for the darkness? He does. It's all in him.

And so we're sitting in darkness, but the light has come. We're sitting in death's shadow, but life has come. Now the next verses, verse 6 and following, it tells us about John the Baptist.

And John the Baptist, it says in verse 6, that he came, he was sent from God. He is a prophet. He speaks on behalf of God.

He says, thus saith the Lord. And so what is John the Baptist's message from God? What does John have to say about him?

Well, he came as a witness to testify concerning that light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. And so now John the Baptist is saying, look, there he is.

[8:57] He's there to testify on God's behalf concerning this light. And then in verse 12, we see what does Jesus do? What does he bring about?

Well, verse 11, he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, Jesus Christ, all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

who is it that turns rebels into children? Well, it's Jesus. And we don't contribute anything to it.

The very next verse, it's that we're born of God, not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will. What Jesus does in bringing rebellious people to become children of God is something that he does.

And he does it without contribution from people. John goes on, verse 14, he came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[10:13] He didn't come like Moses. As the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus. And from his grace, from Jesus's grace, we received one blessing after another.

Christ alone is the source of grace and truth. Generally, in the Gospel of John, John has sort of a peculiar and specific definition when he's talking about truth.

He's talking about heavenly realities come to earth. And so, Jesus is the true bread. He's the true vine.

He's the true temple. He's real food. He's real manna. So, Jesus brings everything that was promised and he brings it and he makes it real.

He brings the eternal, the heavenly. He does it. He comes down. He brings it. And when he appears, that's when the temple of God appears on earth. That's when the true manna appears on earth.

[11:24] And we don't go up to God. We don't build a Tower of Babel up to God. We don't build a ladder up to heaven.

John chapter 1 ends with him saying, I'm the ladder. I'm the ladder. It's Jesus. It's Jesus alone that bridges the gap between God and man.

He brings sinners and a holy God together in one family. And look at verse 29. And verse 29 tells us how he does it.

Again, this is John the Baptist. And I want you to notice where he's drawing our attention, where he was drawing his people's attention. Verse 29, he says, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

It's not, look, the Lamb of God who makes salvation possible. It's not, he takes away the sin of sinful man. He, through the cross.

[12:29] And again, that's where we meet the cross. Because the Lamb is a sacrifice. And he offers himself up at the cross. It's him and him alone. And so John, in chapter 1, is saying it's all about him.

It's what he does. It's what he gives. It's what he brings. And John is doing everything he can to pry your eyes off yourself.

To pry your faith off of yourself. In our works, in our feelings, in our efforts, our good deeds.

And he says, No, salvation is coming. And there he is. Salvation is in a person. It's him. Now we could go on.

And again, the problem here is, this is what the Bible is all about. The Bible has this singular focus about Jesus Christ. So turn with me to Galatians chapter 1.

[13:40] Galatians chapter 1. We sort of looked at this briefly last week. Galatians chapter 1. And at the very beginning, we can begin in verse 6.

And here Paul, you remember the situation. The Galatians are wandering. Their faith has gone off of Christ alone.

And they've added ceremonies and circumcision and all sorts of other things. And Paul says in verse 6, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is no gospel at all.

It's not good news at all. There's only good news in one person. It's the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is no gospel at all. Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion or trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

And so it says in verse 6, it was God that called them. It was God that had called them out of their sinfulness, out of their darkness, out of their lostness.

[14:54] He called them. And how did He then call you? When the Lord calls a sinner, when He called you, what did He yell?

What did He call? What did He say to bring you to Himself? Well, it says the grace of Christ. He called you by the grace of Christ. So, you know, Mom rings the dinner bell and says to the kids, dinner!

And the kids come running because they've heard of dinner as on the table. Well, when God calls, when God calls, He talks about the grace, He yells the grace of Christ.

God says, this is what Jesus has done. This is who He is. This is what He has done for sinful men. The gospel is good news about Jesus.

Me and you are not a part, so to speak, of the good news. God doesn't tell us about the good things that we have done.

[15:58] He doesn't point to anything in us. We don't add anything. We aren't Jesus' sidekicks. We're not His Robin to His Batman.

We're not Barney to His Andy. We aren't part of the story. He's the hero. He's the Savior. Salvation is all in Him.

And our part, again, I think this was a couple weeks ago, our part is to admit what we are. To own it up.

Own up to it. We're ruined sinners. We're helpless, powerless, ungodly. And so we look away from ourselves and we look to Jesus.

Well, that's Galatians. Again, we could say a lot more. Turn over to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1.

[17:08] When the Bible talks about what we have in Jesus, what is the fullness of His grace, it doesn't only talk about justification. It talks about the whole thing.

It talks about every part of salvation. And so, let's just read verses 3-10. And I want you to notice those words that keep on popping up.

So, chapter 1, verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with His pleasure and will to the praise of His glorious grace which He has freely given us in the one He loves.

In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding and He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

[18:44] Again, Paul says that when in verse 6 he says to the praise of His glorious grace so God has given us grace but how did He give it?

Well, He gave it to us in a person. He gave us grace in Christ. He gave us Jesus and in uniting us to Jesus verse 3 says He gave us every spiritual blessing.

He talked about in love He predestined us to be adopted. He gave us forgiveness of sins. He gave us to know what He is doing in this whole world. He's bringing everything under one head even Christ.

God blesses us through our connection to Jesus Christ. And that's it. Every blessing. There's no blessings that remain on the sideline.

There's no blessings that there's a different path other than Jesus Christ. When we have Jesus we have all of God's grace and it is glorious grace.

[19:59] So every blessing is the mercy of Jesus flowing into our lives. So we're empty and He's full and He overflows into us.

So all we have to offer is our emptiness and our need and we look to Him and we find fullness. It's all in Him. It all comes through Him. I don't have time to turn to Colossians.

Colossians is all about the glory of Christ the fullness that we have in Him the freedom that we have in Him. Hebrews says Jesus is better He's better than the angels He's better than Moses and Joshua better than Aaron better than the old covenant better than all the bulls and goats that were ever offered.

He's better because what He offers is real and final and forever real forgiveness final forgiveness everlasting covenant forgiveness of sins.

We turn to the book of Revelation and Revelation 1 verse 1 says it's the revelation of Jesus Christ. He's the hero of the story.

[21:17] He's the hero. And again what is our part? We eagerly await a Savior from heaven. Now I know this is all basic.

I know it's all basic. But that's what the Reformation was all about. It wasn't so much reaching profound new heights of great theology.

It was uncovering and dusting off so to speak the things that are true, things that are real, the things that are precious.

And it's not about us. It's not about us. It's about Him. It's not about our works. It's about His works. It's not about confession or doing so many Hail Marys.

It's about His cross. All of God's grace comes to us in Christ and Him alone. And we would say, well, of course.

[22:24] Of course. So why is this so important? Why is this so important? Why would this cause such trouble in the world? Why is this one of the important doctrines of the Reformation?

And again, we've always talked about this. no one is saying that Jesus had no part to play in the Roman Catholic religion. It doesn't mean that the Catholic Church believes that salvation and Christ don't go together somehow.

But again, it's the alone. It's the only that makes all the difference. The sola, the only, that makes all the difference.

Now, to explain what I mean, I want to give a quote from an interview that Ligonier Ministries did with Sinclair Ferguson for one of his books.

And it answers this question. And so the interviewer asks, how did Solus Christus, Christ alone, become a rallying cry during the Reformation?

[23 : 32] So why is this so important? Why is Christ alone so revolutionary? And why do we need to remember it again? Well, here's Sinclair Ferguson's answer. He answered it like this.

The short answer to this question is that in the late medieval church, Christ had become hidden and distant and obscured behind the way in which the church dispensed grace.

The church taught that salvation is to be found in the church. the reformers agreed with the idea that there is no salvation outside of the church, but they emphasized that the church was only the context for, not the dispenser of salvation.

Do you see the difference? Now, there's no salvation outside of the church. There's who Jesus saves, he joins to the church. They become a part of the church. And it's through the witness of the church that the gospel goes forth.

But, that's just saying that the church is the context, that's the place where it happens. The church does not dispense salvation. He goes on, the church emphasized that grace was almost a commodity that could be distributed through the sacraments.

[24 : 55] As the reformers read the New Testament, they realized that grace is the loving, pardoning disposition of God in Christ toward us.

And so, the great need is to know and to trust and to love and to live in Christ. The church had taken the role that the New Testament ascribes only to the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ.

Christ. So, the church had done two things. They turned grace into just this thing, a commodity, and then they got to be the dispensers of it.

And they became, in one way or another, they become Jesus and they become the Holy Spirit. Grace had become a thing. Grace had become just a bit of spiritual power.

Remember what I said a couple of weeks ago. Grace had stopped being God's loving mercy and disposition of kindness to sinners.

[26 : 08] Grace had become a bit of spiritual power, just this little thing of spiritual power, to help us do what we need to do. So, instead of God being merciful to sinners, God is now giving power to sinners so that sinners might be able to save themselves, to do what they need to do.

And so the church quit being the context where God pours out his grace. The church quit being the recipient of grace and started through its popes and its bishops and its sacraments and its ceremonies.

It had become the dispenser of grace. So God had put grace into the church and the church then dispensed it through its rituals and sacraments.

grace came through merely attending the masses, merely having the sacraments performed in your presence or upon you.

Love, mercy, God's loving heart, God's gracious disposition, Jesus Christ, they were all distant realities.

[27 : 41] They weren't the most important thing for so many people. It was all the church. grace. Well, Sinclair Ferguson said the reformation brought Christ right up to the front again.

Grace is not a commodity that is passed out by the church. Grace is always the love of Jesus. The love of Jesus poured out on hopeless sinners.

sinners. Now, we don't think and we don't act in Protestantism, we don't think and act like the Roman Catholic Church still teaches, but can I say that we still struggle with this temptation, this temptation, this tendency to turn grace into a commodity, to turn grace into this thing that gets dispensed, through our actions or by our actions.

And instead of bringing Christ to the front, we can bring perfectly good things to the front and say grace will come to me through these things quite apart from Christ.

And so Christ is quite in the background. Now to explain kind of what I'm saying, let me quote another part of the same interview. In the preface, this is the question, in the preface to the book *Grace Alone*, you write that grace is not a thing.

[29 : 15] What do you mean by that statement? Here's Sinclair Ferguson's answer. It's legitimate to speak of receiving grace, and sometimes, although I am somewhat cautious about the possibility of misusing language, we speak of the preaching of the word, prayer, and baptism, and the Lord's Supper as means of grace.

That is fine, so long as we remember that there isn't a thing, a substance, or a quasi-substance called grace. This is the important thing.

This is the most important statement. All there is, is the person of the Lord Jesus. Christ clothed in the gospel, as Calvin loved to put it.

Grace is the grace of Jesus. Jesus. If I can highlight the thought here, there's no thing that Jesus takes from himself and then, as it were, hands over to me.

There is only Jesus himself. Grasping that thought can make a significant difference to a Christian's life. So while some people might just think that we're splitting hairs about different ways of saying the same thing, it can make a vital difference.

[30 : 32] It's not a thing that was crucified to give us a thing called grace. It was the person of the Lord Jesus that was crucified in order that he might give himself to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And that's important. It's grace alone because it's really Christ alone. Because when God gives us grace, he gives us his son.

He doesn't give us grace outside of his son and he's saving grace. Life is in him. Everything I need is in him. And so prayer and Bible reading can be effective, so to speak, if I have dealings with him, if I have dealings with Jesus.

The Holy Spirit does use those things to bring me to Christ. But they in themselves, no matter how serious and no matter how earnestly I am doing them, they in themselves, they are not magical, they don't have power in and of themselves.

I don't become a better, a stronger, a more holy Christian by merely going to church or reading my Bible or praying, no matter how seriously or earnestly I do those things.

[31 : 55] I become a holy, I become a stronger Christian by having dealings with Jesus.

Where his mercy, his love, his life, his purity comes into me. And those things are the context in which I meet with him and have dealings with him, but it's all about him and him alone.

his righteousness, his holiness, his beauty, his life, his birth, his resurrection, his exaltation, his rule. It's all about him.

And so, if I do want to experience more of the grace of God in my life, I don't sit and think, okay, I just need to do this and this and this and it will happen.

I need to think, I need to live in and live upon and press in to Jesus. And I do that through prayer and I do that through reading and I do that through hearing the preaching of God's word.

[33 : 01] But those things bring me to Jesus. It's all in him and him alone. All I need and all I ever will need is in him and what he's done.

Now, listen to how, I'm sorry I've been quoting you so many big quotes, but listen to how John Calvin put it in his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Remember, there isn't this thing called grace.

There's just Christ clothed in the gospel. Christ coming as the gospel. And listen to what John Calvin says. We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ.

We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is in him.

What does it mean? What does Jesus mean? What does that name mean? Why did he get that name? What does it mean? Yeah, the Lord saves. God saves.

[34 : 13] It's in him. If we seek any other gifts of the spirit, they will be found in his anointing. What Calvin is saying is Jesus himself was anointed with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

And if I need any gift from the Holy Spirit, it's found in Jesus. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion. Do I need strength?

Where can I find strength? Where is my strength? My strength is in him because he's the king. He's the king of everything. If purity in his conception, because he was born without sin, if gentleness it appears in his birth, for by his birth he was made like us in all aspects, in all respects, that he might learn to feel our pain.

Jesus learned gentleness, so to speak, by experiencing our weakness. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion.

If we seek acquittal, it's in his condemnation. Why can I be acquitted? It's because he was condemned.

[35 : 33] If reconciliation, it's in his descent into hell, his being separated from God. Why can I be reconciled to God because he was cast away?

If satisfaction, satisfaction for my sin in his sacrifice, if purification in his blood, if reconciliation in his descent to hell, if mortification of the flesh in his tomb, if newness of life, if I need newness of life, if I need restored and revived and born again, it's in his resurrection.

If immortality, everlasting life, it's in him because he was raised to never die. If inheritance of all blessings, it's in his kingdom.

If untroubled expectation of judgment, it's in the power given to him to judge. What Calvin is saying is, why can I be hopeful at the second judgment?

Why can I go with confidence to that great and final place where my destiny will be forever decided, so to speak? It's because my savior is the judge.

[36 : 46] In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain and from no other.

So as we end, I just want to ask, what do you need? What do you need this morning? Well, it's all found in him.

So as I end, I'm just going to echo Calvin, our whole salvation and all of its parts, all of its parts are in him.

And so drink your fill from this fountain and no other. Well, that's what we're here to do is to have dealings with Jesus. So let's do that today. Well, we're dismissed.

We're dismissed. We're dismissed. Thank you.