

The Five *Solas* of the Reformation: Solus Christus

OPENING TEXT: 1TIMOTHY 2:1-6

INTRODUCTION

1. "In Christ alone my hope is found," what do those words really mean? How does it connect to the gospel?
2. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness," and should not rest on any more.

I. THE DEFINITION OF SOLUS CHRISTUS

A. A Simple Definition

1. *Solus Christus* is a Latin phrase coined during the sixteenth century Reformation Movement.
2. The Son of God is the only Mediator of the saints, who are justified by His work alone.

B. Historical Context and Exposition

1. **The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) – Chapter V Of the...Only Mediator Jesus Christ**
2. **The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 8 Of Christ the Mediator**
3. **The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647) – Q.36**

C. A Modern Definition and Affirmation

The Cambridge Declaration (1996)

D. Summarizing the Central Presuppositions and Affirmations

1. Christ is the sole Mediator of God's covenant of grace.
2. Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior by which God's people are rescued from spiritual death.
3. Christ's obedience to the Law and His death and resurrection are the sole merits upon which righteousness is imputed to the saints.
4. Christ is the only Mediator by whom we can approach God and that prayer is to be offered only in His name.

II. THE AFFIRMATIONS OF SOLUS CHRISTUS

A. *Solus Christus* Affirms Christ is the Sole Mediator of God's Covenant of Grace

1. There is only one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. **1Tim. 2:5**
 - A mediator stands between two parties to reconcile them and to bring peace.
 - Christ is the mediator who reconciles both Jews and Gentiles to God. **Eph. 2:11-18**
2. The covenant promises were given to Christ. He is both the heir and fulfillment of it. **Ga. 3:16**
3. The Father gave to the Son some to save and fulfilled the promise by covenants. **Jn 6:37; 17:1-6**

B. *Solus Christus* Affirms Christ is the Sole Redeemer and Savior By Which the Saints are Saved

1. We live in a pluralistic world where all roads are said to lead to heaven. **Matt. 7:13-14, 21-27**
2. Jesus makes exclusive claims as the only Savior and way of salvation. **Jn 8:24; 10:10, 25-30; 14:6**
3. There are no 'good moral people' who will be saved apart from God's grace in Christ. **Ro. 3:9-20**
4. The only way to be saved and have eternal life is to flee to Christ for refuge. **2Cor. 5:10-6:2**

C. *Solus Christus* Affirms Christ's Obedience, Death, and Resurrection are the Sole Merits Upon Which Righteousness is Imputed to the Saints

1. The concept of imputed righteousness is scoffed at today, even by many 'evangelicals.'
2. Nevertheless, it is a biblical doctrine and our only hope for being counted righteous before God.
3. Jesus came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it in every respect. **Matt. 5:17-18**
 - Righteousness is demanded of us, a righteousness we cannot attain. **Matt. 5:19-20, 48**
 - Who can say we have or even can attain this righteousness on our own? **Php. 3:7-11**
4. Along with Paul we seek a righteousness that is not our own, the righteousness of God.
 - This righteousness is an imputed status, not a change in our actual state. **Ro. 4:5-8, 11-12** (E.g. the declaration of marriage or acquittal of a guilty defendant – legal, not moral)
 - Christ was treated as sinful for me, so that I might be treated as sinless like Him. **2Co. 5:21**
5. Righteousness is what Christ accomplished for me, not is doing through or to me. **1Cor. 1:30-31**

D. *Solus Christus* Affirms Christ is the Only Mediator by Whom We Can Approach God and that Prayer is to Be Offered Only in His Name

1. I can pray for you. I can intercede for you. But I cannot make peace for you with God.
2. We pray in Jesus' name because His mediation is our only ground for coming to God. **Ac. 4:12**
Q. 180. What is it to pray in the name of Christ?

A. To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promises, to ask mercy for his sake; not by bare mentioning of his name, but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation.

Q. 181. Why are we to pray in the name of Christ?

A. The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator; and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone, we are to pray in no other name but his only.

3. Praying "in Jesus' name" is not formality; it is a theological truth. **Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26**

III. THE CLARIFICATION OF SOLUS CHRISTUS

Solus Christus is in Sharp Contrast to the Roman Catholic System

A. *The Doctrine of Merit*

1. The RCC teaches the necessity of the redemptive work of Christ and of grace.
 - They rightly affirm original sin and that grace must precede man's cooperation with God.
 - They rightly affirm Christ is the Savior whose atonement forgives human sin.
 - They rightly affirm Christ's work is the source from which all good works of men flow.
2. But they deny the complete sufficiency of Christ's work.
 - Men must cooperate with grace so as to merit increase of grace and eternal life.
cf. Exc. Joseph Pohle, "Merit," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 10 (New York: Appleton, 1911)
 - The Treasury of the Church includes merits both of Christ as well as Mary and the saints.
cf. Exc. Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* (January 1, 1967)
3. The Reformation was not about the necessity of grace; it was about the sufficiency of grace.

B. *The Doctrine of Mary*

1. Mary is invoked in Roman Catholicism as "Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix."
cf. Exc. *Lumen Gentium* qtd. in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 969
2. *Mediatrix* refers to Mary's intercessory role in mediating for believers with Christ in salvation.
3. Roman Catholics point out they do not worship Mary and believe Christ is the unique Mediator.
4. But compare the biblical doctrine seen earlier with St. Alphonsus's (1696-1787) prayer to Mary.
5. Mary was a great saint, no doubt, but do God's people have biblical warrant to pray thusly?

IV. THE APPLICATION OF SOLUS CHRISTUS

A. *How Solus Christus Will Affect Our Church's Life and Ministry*

1. The church's view of the sufficiency of Christ will radically affect our doctrine and ministry.
2. Christ's sufficiency gives meaning to grace and obedience. He is the source and object of faith.
3. Everything we do should be done in light of what Christ has first done for us.
4. All of our teaching and practice should continually point us and our hearers back to Christ.

B. *How Solus Christus Will Affect Our Daily Lives*

1. It is not enough to sing "In Christ alone my hope is found..." we have to mean it and live it.
2. This doctrine means I cannot look to myself, in myself, or rely on myself for my salvation.
3. I must discern, reject, and oppose teaching that places hope anywhere other than Christ.
4. I must continually turn to the Lord, seeking His blessing, and never trusting in my own strength.

CONCLUSION

1. What does it mean to preach the gospel? We must preach the good news of Christ's obedience and sacrifice. We must preach He alone is able to justify men. We must preach trust and submission to Him.
2. Many churches have never known or have effectively abandoned the gospel. May it never be so among us.

EXTENDED QUOTATIONS

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566):

Chapter V – Of the Adoration, Worship and Invocation of God Through the Only Mediator Jesus Christ

GOD ALONE IS TO BE ADORED AND WORSHIPPED. We teach that the true God alone is to be adored and worshipped. This honor we impart to none other, according to the commandment of the Lord, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Math. 4:10). Indeed, all the prophets severely inveighed against the people of Israel whenever they adored and worshipped strange gods, and not the only true God. But we teach that God is to be adored and worshipped as he himself has taught us to worship, namely, "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23 f.), not with any superstition, but with sincerity, according to his Word; lest at anytime he should say to us: "Who has required these things from your hands?" (Isa. 1:12; Jer. 6:20). For Paul also says: "God is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything," etc. (Acts 17:25).

GOD ALONE IS TO BE INVOKED THROUGH THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST ALONE. In all crises and trials of our life we call upon him alone, and that by the mediation of our only mediator and intercessor, Jesus Christ. For we have been explicitly commanded: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Ps. 1:15). Moreover, we have a most generous promise from the Lord Who said: "If you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you" (John 16:23), and: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest: (Matt. 11:28). And since it is written: "How are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?" (Rom. 10:14), and since we do believe in God alone, we assuredly call upon him alone, and we do so through Christ. For as the apostle says, "There is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus? (I Tim. 2:5), and, "If any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," etc. (I John 2:1).

THE SAINTS ARE NOT TO BE ADORED, WORSHIPPED OR INVOKED. For this reason we do not adore, worship, or pray to the saints in heaven, or to other gods, and we do not acknowledge them as our intercessors or mediators before the Father in heaven. For God and Christ the Mediator are sufficient for us; neither do we give to others the honor that is due to God alone and to his Son, because he has expressly said: "My glory I give to no other: (Isa. 42:8), and because Peter has said: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," except the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). In him, those who give their assent by faith do not seek anything outside Christ.

THE DUE HONOR TO BE RENDERED TO THE SAINTS. At the same time we do not despise the saints or think basely of them. For we acknowledge them to be living members of Christ and friends of God who have gloriously overcome the flesh and the world. Hence we love them as brothers, and also honor them; yet not with any kind of worship but by an honorable opinion of them and just praises of them. We also imitate them. For with ardent longings and supplications we earnestly desire to be imitators of their faith and virtues, to share eternal salvation with them, to dwell eternally with them in the presence of God, and to rejoice with them in Christ. And in this respect we approve of the opinion of St. Augustine in *De Vera Religione*: "Let not our religion be the cult of men who have died. For if they have lived holy lives, they are not to be thought of as seeking such honors; on the contrary, they want us to worship him by whose illumination they rejoice that we are fellow-servants of his merits. They are therefore to be honored by the way of imitation, but not to be adored in a religious manner," etc.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 8: Of Christ the Mediator

I. It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King, the Head and Savior of His Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

II. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

V. The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him.

The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)

Q. 36. Who is the Mediator of the covenant of grace?

A. The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fulness of time became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person, forever.

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The Cambridge Declaration (1996)

Solus Christus: The Erosion Of Christ-Centered Faith

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision.

Thesis Two: Solus Christus

We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

We deny that the gospel is preached if Christ's substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and his work is not solicited.

Extended Quotations: Roman Catholic Sources

Joseph Pohle, "Merit," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 10 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911)
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Christian faith teaches us that the Incarnate Son of God by His death on the cross has in our stead fully satisfied God's anger at our sins, and thereby effected a reconciliation between the world and its Creator. Not, however, as though nothing were now left to be done by man, or as though he were now restored to the state of original innocence, whether he wills it or not; on the contrary, God and Christ demand of him that he make the fruits of the Sacrifice of the Cross his own by personal exertion and co-operation with grace, by justifying faith and the reception of baptism. It is a defined article of the Catholic Faith that man before, in, and after justification derives his whole capability of meriting and satisfying, as well as his actual merits and satisfactions, solely from the infinite treasure of merits which Christ gained for us on the Cross (cf. Council of Trent, Sess. VI, cap. xvi; Sess. XIV, cap. viii).

...
[E]ternal reward is promised in the Bible to those supernatural works which are performed in the state of grace, and that because they are meritorious (cf. Matthew 25:34 sqq.; Romans 2:6 sqq.; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

...
St. Paul teaches that "whatsoever good thing [bonum] any man shall do, the same shall he receive from the Lord, whether he be bond, or free" (Eph. vi, 8). Not only are more perfect works of supererogation, such as the vow of perpetual chastity, good and meritorious but also works of obligation, such as the faithful observance of the commandments. Christ Himself actually made the attainment of heaven depend on the mere observance of the ten commandments when he answered the youth who was anxious about his salvation: "If thou wilt enter into life keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* (January 1, 1967)

15 Jan. 2015 <http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_pa06id.htm>

Thus is explained the "treasury of the Church" which should certainly not be imagined as the sum total of material goods accumulated in the course of the centuries, but the infinite and inexhaustible value the expiation and the merits of Christ Our Lord have before God, offered as they were so that all of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. It is Christ the Redeemer Himself in whom the satisfactions and merits of His redemption exist and find their force. This treasury also includes the truly immense, unfathomable and ever pristine value before God of the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, who following in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by His grace have sanctified their lives and fulfilled the mission entrusted to them by the Father. Thus while attaining their own salvation, they have also cooperated in the salvation of their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.

Lumen Gentium 62 qtd. in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 969 (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 274-275

This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation....Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.

St. Alphonsus, "A Petition to Mary" in *The Priest's Companion* (New York: Benzinger Brothers Inc., 1952), 60

Most holy Virgin Immaculate, my Mother Mary, to thee who art the Mother of my Lord, the queen of the universe, the advocate, the hope, the refuge of sinners, I who am the most miserable of all sinners, have recourse this day. I venerate thee, great queen, and I thank thee for the many graces thou has bestowed upon me even unto this day; in particular for having delivered me from the hell which I have so often deserved by my sins. I love thee, most dear Lady; and for the love I bear thee, I promise to serve thee willingly forever and to do what I can to make thee loved by others also. I place in thee all my hopes for salvation; accept me as thy servant and shelter me under thy mantle, thou who art the Mother of mercy. And since thou art so powerful with God, deliver me from all temptations, or at least obtain for me the strength to overcome them until death. From thee I implore a true love for Jesus Christ. Through thee I hope to die a holy death. My dear Mother, by the love thou bearest to Almighty God, I pray thee to assist me always, but most of all at the last moment of my life. Forsake me not then, until thou shalt see me safe in heaven, there to bless thee and sing of thy mercies through all eternity. Such is my hope. Amen.