

FBC POWELL, 10-8-17 AM NOTES  
*Solus Christus* – “Christ Alone”  
Various Scriptures  
#3 in Series, “What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Reformation”

**Psalms 11:3** says “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

“The Reformation got to the heart of the matter: right theology. The Reformers rightly diagnosed the disease, and they rightly administered the necessary cure... If we as a church don’t get it right on the doctrines of the Bible, Christ, and salvation, we’ll never head in the right direction, no matter how innovative or energetic or zealous we may be.” —Stephen J. Nichols

I. “Christ Alone” – The Historical Background

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper were no longer symbols of salvation, but the means of receiving salvation.

“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.” —The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

“It is beyond the wit of man to invent a new heresy.” —G. K Chesterton

II. “Christ Alone” – The Centrality of the Cross of Christ

**Galatians 1:6-7** “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

**1 Corinthians 2:1-2** “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

**1 Corinthians 15:3** “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”

**Revelation 5:12** “saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’”

A. The Cross of Christ Alone Provides Satisfaction

The justice of God is “His eternal, immutable commitment always to do what is right”. —R. C. Sproul

**Genesis 18:25b (NIV)** “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

“Sin is cosmic treason.” —R. C. Sproul,

**Romans 6:23a** “For the wages of sin is death...”

**Romans 1:18a** “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

“The holy revulsion of God’s being against that which is the contradiction of His holiness...a positive outgoing of the divine displeasure.”  
— John Murray

“Since all of us, born in sin and God’s enemies, have earned nothing but eternal wrath and hell so that everything we are and can do is damned, and there is no help or way of getting out of this predicament ... therefore another man had to step into our place, namely Jesus Christ, God and man, and had to render **satisfaction** and make payment for sin through suffering and death.”  
—Martin Luther

## B. The Cross of Christ Alone Provides an Acceptable Sacrifice

**Psalms 7:11b (NKJV)** “God is angry with the wicked every day.”

Propitiation – To propitiate is to satisfy or placate the wrath of another.

**Revelation 14:19** “So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.”

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

In paganism, **man** propitiates his gods; religion becomes a sort of bribery. In Christianity, it is God who propitiates his wrath by His own action.

**1 John 4:10** “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

## **Sermon 3: *Solus Christus* – “Christ Alone”**

### **Various Scriptures**

October 31 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what is often called “The Protestant Reformation.” October 31, 1517 is the date that a German Priest named Martin Luther, wrote out a document with ninety-five problem areas in the church (mostly related to abuses that he felt needed to be discussed, debated and changed). In today’s terminology, his documents went viral. Still, using this date (October 31, 1517) as the beginning of the Reformation is somewhat arbitrary. The

Reformation was not a humanly orchestrated, organized movement. Luther wasn't even the one who copied his document and distributed it. The Reformation was a movement initiated by God Himself in various places at close to the same time. As we saw last week, Martin Luther was not the only one who was standing against the corrupt Church of Rome. God was simultaneously at work in other men and women in other countries who for the most part did not even know one another – leaders like John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, Hugh Latimer, Lady Jane Grey, Theodore Beza, and so many more. God was orchestrating all of this, but Luther seemed to be the match that lit the dried kindling.

As we saw in parts one and two of this series, the Protestant Reformation focused on five “battle cries” concerning the doctrine of salvation. The five battle cries were,

***Sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone,**

***Solus Christus* – Christ Alone,**

***Sola Gratia* – Grace Alone,**

***Sola Fide* – Faith Alone, and**

***Sola Deo Gloria* – God's Glory Alone.**

In this message, we are focusing in on the second of those battle cries: *Solus Christus* – Christ Alone. I am well aware that this series is not popular with everyone. There are those who tend to be activists that say, “The church needs to be addressing real problems – social injustice, poverty, people who are marginalized and feel that Christians don't care about them. In addition, the majority of the population on earth is without Christ. Why are we wasting time on something that happened 500 years ago?”

I think those objections are worthy of being answered. The reason that it is important to understand the Protestant Reformation is because these five battle cries of the Reformation are the foundation on which we stand. Psalm 11:3 says, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” If we are not firmly standing on the doctrinal truths of the Reformation, we will find ourselves doing no more than giving temporary relief to the lost and hurting, but unable to help them eternally. These battle cries of the Reformation (the *Solas*) keep us grounded in the truth as we actively seek to win the lost and genuinely, from an eternal perspective, help those hurting because of social injustice, poverty, being marginalized, and those without Eternal Life.

Stephen Nichols, a historian, said it better than I can: “The Reformation got to the heart of the matter: right theology. The Reformers rightly diagnosed the disease, and they rightly administered the necessary cure... If we as a church don't get it right on the doctrines of the Bible, Christ, and salvation, we'll never head in the right direction, no matter how innovative or energetic or zealous we may be.” [Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation*, pages 21-22]

As we examine this second battle cry of the Protestant Reformation, may we not just see it as history, but as the truth that the church not only stood on, but is still standing on.

## **I. “Christ Alone” – The Historical Background**

When the reformers spoke of Christ alone, they were primarily referring to the cross and all He did there that was alone the basis of true salvation. At the end of the period of history called “The Dark Ages” (600 – 1500 AD), the doctrine of salvation had been taken captive by the corrupt visible church, and the reformers sought to set it free. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the visible, organized church was corrupt almost beyond comprehension. It bore no resemblance to the church in the book of Acts. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper were no longer*

*symbols of salvation, but the means of receiving salvation.* The truth of the Scripture was hidden from the common people since they were forbidden to have the Scriptures in their own language. As we saw last week, the ultimate authority was no longer the Scriptures, but the church – its traditions and official dictates from its Bishops and its Popes. It was indeed the dark ages.

At the beginning of the reformation a key word was “merit.” A person could be saved only to the extent that he or she had gained enough merit before God. Faith had come to mean faithfulness to the teachings and traditions of the visible church. Good works were viewed as carrying out devotional exercises like prayer, but the prayers were just rituals without meaning to the person praying. Without the Word of God to guide their prayers, they had no power. Within the church (and still within the Roman Catholic church today), there was no such thing as assurance of salvation, since no one could ever know if they had accumulated enough merit. In the early 1500’s people lived in hopelessness and spiritual darkness with no Bible and no one to teach them what the Bible said apart from contradictory church traditions. This largely explains why they were in what is called today the “dark ages.”

Let’s move forward five centuries to today. There is a growing number of the visible, organized church that has, heretically redefined, or denied the truth of “Solus Christus.” Christ’s cross has been minimized and as a result the Biblical doctrine of salvation has been perverted. One poll showed that 76% of evangelicals believe that man is basically good by nature and that 86% believe that the Gospel is mostly about God helping us help ourselves. [These statistics are found in James Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* page 88] We need another reformation.

The Cambridge Declaration, a document produced by The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (4-20-1996) rightly says:

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.

The British author G. K Chesterton said, “It is beyond the wit of man to invent a new heresy.” From history comes the heresy of either denying, watering down or perverting Christ’s work on the cross – the atonement. In much of the church today, Jesus Christ is no longer the Savior who shed His blood and absorbed the wrath of the Father as our substitute; He is now a teacher, a model for us, and a liberator from poverty and injustice. The penal substitutionary atonement (which I will explain later) is quickly being abandoned as the accomplishment and meaning of the cross is watered down to mean that Jesus’ cross was just a good example of being willing to die for something important to you. We are not a whole lot better than the church in 1517.

## **II. “Christ Alone” – The Centrality of the Cross of Christ**

When we speak of Solus Christus, we are saying that our salvation is because of Christ and His finished work on the cross *alone*. He has done the work of salvation so thoroughly, so completely that no merit on the part of man, no works performed can add to His completed work. In fact, we are told in Galatians 1:6-7 that to try to add anything to Christ alone constitutes a different gospel. Galatians 1:6-7: “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” The Reformation was a coming back to the true meaning of the cross of Christ.

When it comes to the true Gospel, the true meaning of the cross, we want to get to crux of the matter. By the way, the word “crux” comes from the Latin word for “cross.” It is because of the cross and what Christ accomplished there that we can be justified, redeemed, and reconciled to God. That is why Paul, when he came to Corinth, said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2: “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” The reason he proclaimed Christ and Him crucified is that there is no salvation apart from the cross of Christ alone. Without the true cross of Christ, there is no true Christianity.

If the cross of Christ is the focal point of Christianity, the central truth, then you would expect that on the one hand the doctrine of the cross would be plain and simple. It is! 1 Corinthians 15:3: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” On the other hand, you would expect the cross of Christ to be so deep that we can never plumb the depths of it. It is! We see that depth when we think about the biblical words used to explain the cross: substitution, sacrifice, satisfaction, atonement, expiation, propitiation, redemption, ransom, reconciliation, and many more. [If I live long enough, I would like to do a series with a message on each of those words]. We further see the centrality of the cross when we see how it is foretold, illustrated, and prefigured all through the Scriptures. From Genesis 3:15 to the Passover lamb in Exodus, to the sacrificial system in the first five books of the Bible, to Psalm 22 which describes the cross in detail, to Isaiah 53, we see the cross pictured throughout the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the cross is central in the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles, and in Revelation where we see the throngs of heaven worshipping Jesus, the Lamb of God. Revelation 5:12: “saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb *that was slain* to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’” Someone described the doctrine of the cross as being a pool in which a child can wade as well as an ocean where an elephant can swim. We may, and should, go deeper into the cross and what Christ accomplished there, but we can never go beyond the cross. The Reformation was all about restoring the Gospel concerning the cross.

Let’s examine the doctrine of the cross that the reformers sought to restore. I want us to see why the cross of Christ is central and why salvation is in Christ alone instead of being in human merit and rituals and good works.

### **A. The Cross of Christ Alone Provides Satisfaction**

The Reformers knew that salvation is in Christ alone because nothing but Christ crucified could ever satisfy the justice and wrath of the God we have so deeply offended. To provide satisfaction to one wronged and offended requires a sufficient payment for wrongs done. We can never begin to understand the cross until we see the seriousness and depth of the offense we have been guilty of toward God. This sufficient payment is called “atonement.”

Let’s go back to history a moment. One of the few bright lights in the dark ages was a man on whom the Reformers built what they taught. His name was Anselm of Canterbury. He was appointed the archbishop of England in 1093. His greatest contribution was a work he did on the atonement called, “Why the God-Man?” or “Why Did God Become Man?” Anselm certainly wasn’t the first to teach what he did on the atonement, but he probably said it best. The central thesis of Anselm’s work was that God became man to make atonement for sin as the only ground for salvation. To understand the necessity of the cross, Anselm began with the character or the perfections of God and then articulated the sinfulness of sin in light of who God is. I want to take the same path Anselm did in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century.

First, think with me about the character or attributes of God. The perfection or attribute of God that Anselm majored on was His justice. The main answer to the question that became the title

of Anselm's work (*Why the God-Man?*) was because God is just. Today when we ask why God sent His Son into the world, the quick answer is "It is because He loved us." That is certainly not incorrect, but it doesn't really answer the question of why sending His Son was necessary to demonstrate His love for us. The sending of His Son to die on the cross was necessary because God is just. What do we mean when we talk about the justice of God? In the Old Testament, God's justice was tied to His righteousness. R. C. Sproul defines the justice of God as "His eternal, immutable commitment always to do what is right" [R. C. Sproul, *The Truth of the Cross*, page 19] Abraham voiced it well in Genesis 18:25b (NIV): "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" God is a just God who always does what is right and is never capricious, whimsical, or arbitrary.

Second, look with me at the consequence of sin. To understand the necessity of the cross, we must understand the seriousness and consequences of sin. One of my favorite definitions of sin is the one by R. C. Sproul, "Sin is cosmic treason." Sin is not a bad decision or a mistake; sin is cosmic treason against our creator who is perfectly just. Even what we think of as the smallest sin is unimaginably hideous because of the infinite holiness and righteousness of the God that sin is against.

Most people don't think they have a need for atonement because they don't comprehend the consequences of their sin. They are only interested in their best life now. If people really saw the seriousness of their sin and the absolute holiness and justice of God, they would be filling the churches and the altars crying out, "What must I do to be saved?" I am convinced that a modern Reformation would result in thousands of conversions. Because our culture does not comprehend the justice of God and the consequences of sin, they think that all we must do to be saved is to give mental assent to some facts. When we then die a loving grandfatherly god is waiting for all of us with understanding and forgiveness and with open arms will welcome us into a heaven that is whatever we want it to be. Over 900 years ago Anselm in laying the foundation for the Reformation said that if anyone imagines that God can simply forgive us, that person has "not yet considered what a heavy weight sin is." Because God is just and righteous, He cannot tolerate unrighteousness. He must do what is right. Because sin is cosmic treason, what is right is death. Romans 6:23a: "For the wages of sin is death..."

Sin then is cosmic treason against God and results in the sinner being under the sentence of eternal death. Because God is just and holy, sin cannot simply be arbitrarily pardoned because that would make God unjust and unrighteous. The Reformers understood that and it laid the foundation for the Reformation.

Perhaps the most devastating thing about sin is that it provokes God's wrath. Romans 1:18a: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." The wrath of God is judicial; it is a function of His justice (it is not a divine temper tantrum). I like John Murray's definition of God's wrath: "The holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of His holiness...a positive outgoing of the divine displeasure" [Quoted in J. I. Packer, *In My Place Condemned He Stood*, page 35]

Because of the seriousness of sin, we are condemned and under the wrath of God. Until we grasp that, we will never see the beauty of God's love, God's grace, and God's mercy. We will never understand the amazing love of God in the atonement, and we will never grasp the truth of Solus Christus – Salvation is in Christ alone. This explains why there was so little joy in the pre-reformation days. I love what Martin Luther said about the satisfaction Christ alone provides:

Since all of us, born in sin and God's enemies, have earned nothing but eternal wrath and hell so that everything we are and can do is damned, and there is no help or way of getting out of this predicament ... therefore another man had to step into our place,

namely Jesus Christ, God and man, and had to render **satisfaction** and make payment for sin through suffering and death.

[Quoted in James M. Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace*, page 95]

## **B. The Cross of Christ Alone Provides an Acceptable Sacrifice**

Sacrifice has to do with satisfying God's wrath. To see sin evoking the wrath of God helps us see it as a personal matter. God is angry because of sin. Psalms 7:11b (NKJV): "God is angry with the wicked every day." God's anger and wrath must be turned aside if we are to be reconciled with Him. The sacrifice required to satisfy God's wrath is called in the Bible "propitiation." This word is used in Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2, and 1 John 4:10. To propitiate is to satisfy or placate the wrath of another. It has become popular in these postmodern days to belittle and reject the concept of an angry and wrathful God who demands a sacrifice for sin. The cry is "That's like paganism where a virgin or a child was sacrificed to placate the anger of some imagined deity; the God of the Bible is a God of love."

Let's examine this objection. From Genesis to Revelation we see that our problem is the wrath of God toward our sin. In Genesis God's wrath is displayed through the flood and destruction of all mankind except Noah and his family. In Revelation during the period called the great tribulation, we see the wrath of God being poured out time after time. Revelation 14:19: "So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God." Get a concordance and look up the word "wrath" and you may be surprised at how prevalent it is in the Old and New Testaments. Let's look at the claim that it's just like paganism. That statement shows an ignorance of biblical propitiation. In paganism, *man* propitiates his gods; religion becomes a sort of bribery. In Christianity, it is God who propitiates his wrath by His own action. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." It is only when we see the wrath of God that we begin to really comprehend the love of God. 1 John 4:10: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Nowhere in the Bible are human beings told to placate, propitiate God's wrath. God's wrath was propitiated by His own Son whom *HE* sent!