

## Why Not Christ Alone? by Pastor Marty

Proposing an alternative to the five *Solas* of the Protestant Reformation is an extremely risky endeavor indeed. A majority of Christians view that event in absolute terms: either the divine work of God to restore His Church, or greatest schism to ever dismember the Body of Christ. I personally know some who hold the *Solas* so sacrosanct they would deny even the possibility of any negative extremes for any of them while others cannot say anything good about Luther or Calvin, describing them as heretics or traitors like Judas—or even Lucifer himself! Although offering alternatives to the *Solas* may seem to be aimed entirely at Protestants, my goal is for a position that is biblical while affirming good orthodoxy and orthopraxy—doctrine and practice—-independent of denominational streams. Keeping Scripture, Faith, and Grace as primary instead of as solitary can help us avoid some of the pitfalls that arise in our paths. There is wisdom in the claim that every heresy the Church has had to fight against has arisen from some kernel of truth taken to an unhealthy extreme. However, we should not interpret “balance” as meaning we avoid devotion or commitment: there is no place in Christianity for lukewarm faith, indifferent behavior, or moderate sanctification; our faith and love toward God must be extreme.

***There is no place in Christianity for mediocre Faith, love, practice, or sanctification.***

I began this series with a discussion of *Sola Scriptura* “Scripture Alone.” It was the easiest *Sola* to address because it deals with a tangible object—the Bible—often used in a myriad of unintended ways. I expect that almost all of us have at one time or another come in contact with a person or teaching that misinterprets Scripture in one way or another. From that point, the evaluations have been getting steadily harder because the erroneous extremes are less common—though still important to discuss. Focusing on faith to the detriment of having the accompanying works (i.e., fruit) is no small issue today and can lead to believers who have lifestyles that do not match their confessions. Similarly, focusing on grace is hardly problematic in Christian orthodoxy until it inhibits our realizing our identity in God; if we accept sin and sinfulness as unavoidable in our lives, we undermine our resistance to temptation. Additionally, each topic has built upon earlier discussions. For example, recognizing and addressing some problematic extremes with “Faith Alone” largely involved erroneous exegesis related to Scripture while it also formed the foundation for a good understanding of God’s grace. As Jesus was quick to explain to His disciples, a secure foundation is absolutely vital for a house to survive a storm.

***As Jesus said, a secure foundation is absolutely vital for a house to remain secure.***

This fourth newsletter is discussing *Solus Christus*, the idea of “Christ Alone” as our focus. This is not easy because we do not find many errors related to the claim that Jesus is unique in the universe and our lives. No true Christian could ever claim that we should consider Buddha, Muhammed, or even Scripture itself as the source of our salvation. The Bible is very clear that Jesus is “THE Way, THE Truth, and THE Life, and NOBODY gets to the Father except through Him.” Historically speaking, there has been only a couple heresies related to an extreme stress upon the person of Jesus. The first involved Modalism, which claimed the Trinity was an apparent distinction that does not exist. In essence, there are no distinct Persons for the Godhead; He just “appeared” in different forms throughout history. Another extreme involved Tri-Theism, which accepted that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist but were actually different Gods. Jesus became the focus because He was the one who saved humanity. In some cases, this was merged with Gnosticism to the point that the Old Testament God was Lucifer! The

early Church quickly condemned that heresy. Incorrect concepts about Jesus leads to amazingly bad actions and lifestyles. Early Christians recognized that bad theology invariably results in bad practice.

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For this newsletter, I'm not going to be discussing actual theological errors related to putting an excessive focus on Jesus, for that would not apply to the majority of people who would be reading this. Instead, I want to discuss a few of the ways *Solus Christus* as a focus might potentially limit our ongoing relationship with God. This will also be more of a relative discussion because there is no exact formula for identifying our worship and relationship with God. Like any relationship, there is development and growth according to those involved. However, there are points where it might benefit us to reconsider the stress we put on each member of the Godhead to evaluate if we are missing out on something that would significantly improve our spiritual life. In line with prior parts of this series, I am going to suggest that *Primus Christus*, Christ as Primary, might serve us better in certain respects. Again, this is not to suggest salvation can be found in anyone else, for there is no other name through which we are saved. However, all three Persons of the Trinity have a part to play, so it can help us to recognize each aspect.

***All Persons in the Trinity have parts to play in our salvation—past, present, & future.***

As we read the New Testament, we do not have to spend much time before we see repeated references to God as our Father. It was a common description used by the apostle Paul. However, it was not just his opinion, for Jesus also directed the people's attention to God the "Father" repeatedly. There are certainly times when Jesus spoke about Himself in direct and significant ways, and the gospel writers did so as well, but if we actually look at what Jesus taught, we find that the Son spent relatively little time talking about Himself compared to how much He spoke about the Father. This was not just unique to Him, for the Trinity is surprisingly non-egotistical: the Father tells people to listen to the Son, the Spirit points people to the Son, and the Son continually tells people about the Father. We even find that many times when Jesus talks about Himself, it is in the context of declaring to people that "if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father." Jesus considered it extremely important not only that the people of Israel had an accurate perspective of who the Father was but also that they had a personal relationship with Him. If Jesus considered this a vital part of His message for a nation that arguably had the best family structures in the entire ancient world, we certainly need to hear that message more so, considering that more people now come from broken families than from healthy and complete ones.

***If Israel needed to learn more about the "Father," then we need to do so even more.***

Truth-based psychology, sociology, and anthropology all tell us that fathers and mothers play a significant part in the growth and development of human beings, and their roles are not identical. The father has an ability to affirm his children's identity that is as significant and necessary as the mother's ability to impart a sense of being and well-being. This is not to say that single parents have no hope, for God is certainly able to make up for anything that is missing in our lives, but it is undeniably harder for one person to raise a child than it would be for two. In the context of human development, we need to recognize that God as "Our Father" has an ability to not only call us to a new identity but also affirm in us who He has made us to be. As our Creator, He can certainly complete anything that may be missing or incomplete within us; however, Jesus stressed our need to recognize the "Father" aspect of God—and considering how much He valued, affirmed, and recognized women more than any other culture of the time, it would be erroneous to assume His doing so was because He was limited in His view of God due to growing up in a patriarchal culture. There is something specifically about God being Our Father

that Jesus knew all people needed to recognize and nurture, and He repeatedly promoted that Father-child relationship because it is inherently vital to our becoming what we were ultimately meant to be.

***The Father-child relationship is inherently vital to our being what we are meant to be.***

As we read the New Testament, we see that having a personal relationship with Jesus does not mean we are not also supposed to have a relationship with the Father; on the contrary, He describes it as intrinsic to being a Christian—being adopted as a child of God the Father. With this being the case, we should devote some of our focus on the Father-child aspect as well as on the Lord-believer identity. However, Jesus also instructs us to develop a relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead. He is the one who leads and guides us. Paul explains that being led by the Spirit is absolutely necessary if we desire to resist the power of sin. It is true that the Holy Spirit speaks to us about Jesus and all that He said, but it is also true that Jesus spoke to us about the place of the Spirit in our lives. If those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God, then being led by the Spirit is a requirement—and it is a practice that inherently requires having a personal relationship with Him so we will be able to recognize His presence, His voice, and His prompting. If we neglect our relationship with the Spirit Himself simply because He points to the Son, we are ignoring who He is, what He does, and the reason Jesus specifically told us to wait for Him: we need to have a relationship with Him so we can actually follow the commands of Jesus. He is the one through Whom we receive our adoption.

***Our relationship with the Spirit is vital to following His commands and knowing Him.***

Having a personal relationship with each member of the Trinity is necessary for our spiritual life to be complete and growing. Focusing exclusively on Jesus will deprive us of significant aspects of what it means to be Christian. However, that is not the only area where *Solus Christus* might need revision. A different aspect of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sola was to refute the idea that believers needed human mediators between ourselves and God. It was a rejection of the priesthood, which had declared that the average believer could not approach God without clergy to intervene with the sacraments. This is another case of the baby being thrown out with the baptismal water. Both extremes in this area are fraught with error. If we cannot approach God without another person present, we are choosing a human being to replace Jesus as our mediator and savior, but if we believe we can function independent of any leadership, we have removed ourselves from accountability and biblical instruction: we can confess our sins directly to God and be forgiven, but scripture also says that confessing to another person is sometimes necessary; anyone can pray for the sick, but we are told of a special power when the elders anoint a sick person with oil; and Jesus is present wherever 2 or 3 are gathered together in His name, but marriage is a holy covenant that demands the affirmation of an ordained minister. Our ability to approach God directly is inseparable from a duty to intercede on behalf of others and a humility to submit ourselves to others.

***As a royal priesthood, we minister to others but also need others to minister to us.***

In this newsletter, I have tried to discuss the primary place Jesus must have in our lives while also suggesting that His being primary does not mean we do not also need personal relationships with the Father and the Spirit, nor does it mean there is no place for priests or ministers to be in positions of authority over us. Jesus is the only Mediator necessary between us and God; however, scripture itself instructs us to intercede on behalf of others, Christians and non-Christians, and if we are to intercede on behalf of other believers at times, then clearly there are times when we need others to intercede on our behalf. If we try to go it alone what the Bible tells us we need others, we are being foolish. Keeping Jesus Primary in our faith promotes a spiritual life reflecting health, wisdom, and a good bit of humility.