

“The Five Solae, part 2”

Responsive Reading: *Solus Christus; Soli Deo Gloria!*¹

By now, you’re probably aware that October 31, 2017—All Saints’ Eve—is recognized as the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. And you probably remember that today and last Sunday, we’re reviewing what are known as “The Five *Solae* of the Reformation.”

As we noted last week, *sola* is the Latin word for “only,” or “alone,” and *solae* is its plural form.² You can find the Five *Solae* listed in various orders, but I think you will always find these five:

Sola Scriptura = Only Scripture
Sola Gratia = Only Grace
Sola Fide = Only Faith
Solus Christus = Only Christ
Soli Deo Gloria = Only for the Glory of God

We considered *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fide* last week, and this morning we’re going to look at *Solus Christus* and *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Solus Christus. *Christus* is the Latin word for *Christ*, which is the Greek word for “anointed one.” And each of these refers to the Hebrew term, *Messiah*.³ *Solus Christus*, experienced through *Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia*, means that God’s amazing grace makes salvation available to any and all persons who place their faith in Jesus of Nazareth as God’s eternal, perfect sacrifice on our behalf . . . and through no other means.

Solus Christus expresses the New Testament principle that “*there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12) and that there is only “*one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5). As Jesus Himself told us, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

But *Solus Christus* means more than this. As we read together earlier, *Solus Christus* affirms and celebrates the glorious reality that

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on November 5, 2017; for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

² *Solas* is an Anglicized form.

³ See Genesis 3:15; 12:2; Deuteronomy 18:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; and Zechariah, among dozens of others.

Solus Christus means that we need no further prophets to deliver new revelation, no more priests to make sacrifice and to mediate salvation, and no other king to rule the church (Hebrews 2:16-17, 4:14-16, 7:25-26).⁴ Jesus Himself is our Prophet, Priest, and King.

Jesus' life and teaching, Jesus' death, and Jesus' resurrection were the Hinge Point of human history. Salvation has been achieved. Victory has been won. God's Eternal Kingdom has begun.

Now to make such claims as these about Jesus of Nazareth means that here, at *Solus Christus*, we run into the complication of the idea of the Trinity, or "One God in Three Persons." As you may know, the word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. The idea of the Trinity developed as the early Christians tried to describe the various ways in which they experienced personal relationship with God.

Their process of discovery went something like this: Jesus' first disciples, who were all Jewish and who took their faith very seriously, already knew and worshiped "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." With everyone else, those first disciples were scandalized when Jesus began to preach and teach that He was Himself that same God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—appearing in human flesh. When Jesus made such outrageous statements as "*If you have seen me, you have seen the Father . . . I and the Father are one . . . before Abraham was born, I AM!*" He could have said nothing more shocking than this (John 14:9, 10:30, 8:58).

Now when someone claims to be God, that claim is either true or false. If it is false, the claimant either knows it is false or else he does not. If the impostor knows his claim is false, then he is a manipulative liar. If he does not know his claim is false, then he is out of touch with reality. Because Jesus of Nazareth was not the sort of person one could easily dismiss either as insane or as a manipulative liar, He convinced many of those who heard Him in the first century that He was telling the truth.

Those who believed in Jesus were astonished to meet Him again in physical form soon after they had seen Him crucified; and then, not long after they had watched Him ascend into the heavens, they discovered that this same Jesus was now somehow inside them as the Holy Spirit of God, directing them and empowering them to do things they could never have done before.

When they worked it all out, they found that they had arrived at the idea of a Three-Personal God—a "Trinity." The background to today's *PowerPoint* is a "Triquetra," an ancient symbol that attempts to convey "Three in One and One in Three."

This concept was no easier for the first Christians to comprehend than it is for us to understand after them. The "doctrine of the Trinity" developed as those early disciples tried to make sense of their own personal experience and of Jesus' teachings, such as this one: "*If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the **Father**, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the **Spirit** of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you***" (John 14:15-18).⁵

⁴ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel* (Brazos Press, 2016), p. 150.

⁵ The Apostle's Creed (A.D. 140), the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), the Athanasian Creed (A.D. 350), and the Chalcedonian Creed (A.D. 451) were notable among the many efforts to define the doctrine of the Trinity.

I doubt that we will ever have more than the faintest notion of God's Trinitarian Nature on this side of eternity; but the most important thing about the Trinity is not that we *understand* this Three-Personal God, so much as that we *experience personal relationship* with God.

But there's still more to *Solus Christus*. Those first believers, dejected and despairing on Good Friday, were so transformed on Sunday morning that over the next fifty years they literally changed the direction of human history. This transformation, of course, came when they met Jesus alive, resurrected, in human flesh once more.

Paul gave us one of the earliest written records of Jesus' resurrection when he wrote that "*I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was **buried**, that he was **raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he **appeared** to Cephas [Peter], then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James [Jesus' half-brother], then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).*

Paul based his own authority on his commission from the Risen Christ, and he said, "If you don't believe me, there are several hundred other people you can ask about this." Nearly every one of Jesus' inner circle,⁶ and many others besides (including Jesus' half-brother, James), were eventually executed because they refused to recant their affirmation that Jesus was, in fact, God, that He was alive, that they had talked with Him, eaten with Him, and had seen the marks of crucifixion on His body. But there's more.

Once they had met the Risen Christ, these early Christians no longer called Him "Jesus." They called Him "**Lord** Jesus," a title by which they identified Him as Very God of Very God. Paul wrote that "*If you confess with your mouth, '**Jesus is Lord**,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Romans 10:9); "*I want you to know that . . . no one can say, '**Jesus is Lord**,' except by the Holy Spirit*" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Duane Litfin, former president of Wheaton College, wrote that when we say that "Jesus is Lord," "we mean that He is the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, the Goal of all things, the Redeemer of all things, and the Judge of all things. It is an outrageous claim—unless it is true. But if it is true, as Christians affirm, then it means that the person of Jesus is utterly central to all that humans can know or experience. There is nothing imaginable that is irrelevant to Him or to which He is irrelevant. There is no quarter of human learning in which He is not the central figure."⁷

"In the end," Litfin wrote, "we must stand or fall before Jesus Christ. . . . Jesus Christ is a scandalous stone of stumbling to the world. The all-encompassing nature of the Bible's claims for Jesus renders Him unique. He is not merely one Lord, one Savior, among many; He is the singular Sovereign of the universe, the only-begotten Son of the Father, the once-for-all-God-man. If He is truly the universe's Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, the very Goal of all things, then there can be no other."⁸ *Solus Christus! **Jesus . . . is LORD.***

Well, the time gets away, and we must look for a moment at *Soli Deo Gloria*—All and Only for the Glory of God. This is, after all, what the whole Story is about.

⁶ The only exception was John, who apparently survived an attempt to kill him.

⁷ Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 38-44.

⁸ Litfin, pp. 78, 81. See also John Ortberg,

Soli Deo Gloria. Like the other solae, *Soli Deo Gloria* is partly intended to exclude an error. This particular error is one to which we humans are especially prone. We are inveterate seekers of glory for ourselves, not for God.⁹

The Hebrew word for “glory” is *kabod*. It is a wonderful word that conveys the ideas of “weight” (as in “weightiness”), “substance,” and “significance.”¹⁰ And “to glorify” God is to make God’s significance known to others. Psalm 19 begins with the exultant cry that “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands. . . . Their message has gone out to the whole earth, and their words to the ends of the world*” (Psalm 19:1, 4).

You and I don’t glorify God because God has unmet ego needs. We glorify God because worship is our natural response to experiencing God’s presence and to seeing God’s handiwork. When we experience God’s Voice within, when we see a spectacular sunset or the glory of the autumn leaves or the splendor of a radiant sunrise or the power of an awesome storm, one of the first things we want to do is to tell someone . . . and the best way to begin such telling is to say “Thank you, Lord!”

Radiance is one idea the Bible associates with God’s glory, and you may remember that when Moses met God in the Tent of Meeting, his face was literally so radiant thereafter that he had to put a covering over it (Exodus 34:29-35). There’s a fascinating insight about God’s glory in Exodus 33 that bears on this morning’s discussion.

The Bible tells us that “*the LORD would speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend*” (Exodus 33:11), and on one of those occasions, Moses asked God, “*Please, let me see your glory*” (Exodus 33:18). Now what would you expect God to do in response to such a request? Would you expect thunder, lightning, earthquakes, visions of galaxies, or other special effects?

Here’s how God responded, and the response provides God’s own definition of divine glory: “***I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you***” (Exodus 33:19). This is really quite amazing. God is most certainly the Source of wisdom, power, and strength; but *in God’s own words, the most glorious thing about God is how GOOD God is.*¹¹ And that, my friends, is a VERY IMPORTANT point.

One of the most important lines in *The Shack* is God’s statement to Mackenzie that “**You don’t trust me because you don’t believe that I’m good.**”¹² That’s true for you and for me, as well. If we are ever going to know God in the intimate, loving, personal, and trusting way that God intends, we’re going to have to be convinced that God is Good, all the evil and suffering in the world notwithstanding.

And that, my friends, is why “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). The verb for “dwelt” comes from the root, *skene* (εσκηνωσεν), which means “tent” or “tabernacle,” so the verse could really be translated, “The Word became flesh and camped out among us.”

⁹ It was seeking glory for themselves that led Adam and Eve to rebel against God (Genesis 3:6); and it was seeking glory for themselves that led our forebears to attempt the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4). Each of the *solae* provides protection against this tendency.

¹⁰ See C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” preached on June 8, 1942 at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, England. Also *The Weight of Glory* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1949, 1980).

¹¹ John Ortberg, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2012/july/forglorygod.html>

¹² William Paul Young, *The Shack: Where Tragedy Meets Eternity*, <http://www.theshack.movie/>

In the time of Moses, the glory of God resided in a little tent outside the camp. But now, God's glory has come in the form of a tiny, vulnerable baby. Now we can *touch* God's glory. Now we can *see* God's glory: **"I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and you shall call His name Jesus."**¹³

Sometimes you and I may think God is far away, too busy to care about our day-to-day lives. But Jesus reminds us that is not the case. God loves us enough to have become human, like we are. God took on a real body, like yours. God experienced real feelings, like mine. God in human flesh had parents, like ours. Jesus experienced real pain, like we do. He faced real hardship, like you do. God doesn't observe the world from a safe distance. God drew close. God moved into the neighborhood. God became one of us (Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 4:14-16).¹⁴

Religion, my friends, grows out of our human effort to find God. But that's not how things work with God. Yes, we do have to want to know God (Jeremiah 29:13); but the fact of the matter is that **God has come after us**. In Jesus, God has come looking for the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost child, the lost children (Luke 15).¹⁵

This same Jesus, who hung the stars in space and who sustains the cosmos by His own Word of Power, is here, in this room, right now, as He promised to be (Matthew 18:20). **He has come to find you.**

My friends, Jesus is the Way, and those who follow Him will never be lost. Jesus is Truth, and those who obey Him will never be deceived. Jesus is Life, and those who live in Him will never die. Those who trust their lives to Jesus will inherit the Kingdom prepared by God since before the foundation of the world (Luke 12:32; John 14:6; Ephesians 1:4).

And so we have come full circle. It is only through God's **Word** that we know God's Character and Purpose. It is only through God's **Grace** that there is a way Home to God at all. It is only through God's **Son** that our Sin is forgiven and only through **Faith** that we receive that forgiveness. And all of this together proclaims God's **Glory** (and Goodness!).

The Bible tells us that although we have *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23), *"God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**"* (Colossians 1:27). *"For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).¹⁶

It all seems impossible, but so it is. Glory be to God alone!

¹³ Ortberg, "Glory."

¹⁴ Ortberg, "Glory."

¹⁵ *"I am the Good Shepherd,"* Jesus told us. *"I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father"* (John 10:14-15, 18).

¹⁶ See also John 17:22; Romans 8:18; Colossians 3:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Peter 5:1, 4.

Solus Christus! Soli Deo Gloria!

Solus Christus!

Leader: **Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,** for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

People: Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. **He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).**

Soli Deo Gloria!

Leader: The heavens declare the **glory** of God, and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands (Psalm 19:1)

People: **The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD's glory, as the water covers the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).**

Leader: So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his **glory**, the glory of the Father's one and only Son (John 1:14).

People: **We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).**

Leader: Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of **glory**. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

People: **So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).**

Leader: The Word of God for the People of God.

People: **Thanks be to God!**