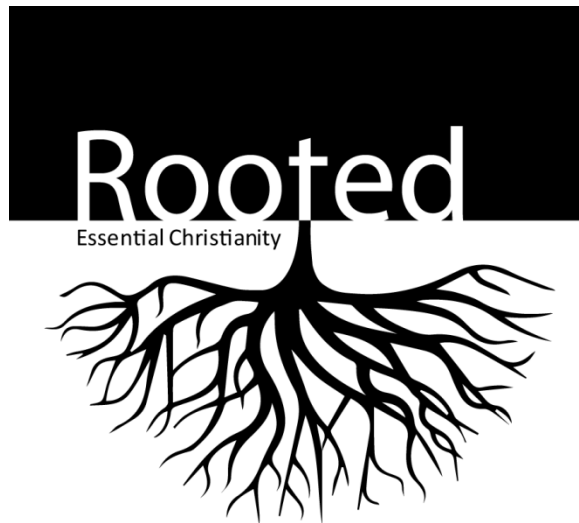




The Reformation Solas

Part 4 – Solus Christus

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

The Apostle Paul was a man with a one-track mind. Following his conversion, Paul embraced a singleness of purpose in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He cared more about the gospel than his reputation, his comfort, or his safety. He was not interested in Christianity as a social movement or political ideology. What mattered to Paul was the person and work of Christ. This is reflected in his words to the Corinthian church, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

The message of Christ and him crucified (the gospel) occupied the place of supreme importance in Paul's ministry. He could have spent his entire ministry preaching about the moral teachings of Jesus, his ethical code, his perfect wisdom, or his miracles. And certainly Paul did address those things on many occasions. However, of all the matters concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ it was his death on the cross which occupied the place of supreme importance (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

In the 16th century it became clear to the Protestant Reformers that the medieval church had traded its focus upon the finished work of Christ on the cross for a complex hodgepodge of extra-biblical doctrines and practices. The Mass was and is today the centerpiece of worship in the Church of Rome. As the priest pronounced the words "this is my body" (*hoc est corpus meum*) it was (and still is) believed that the bread and wine were mystically transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus. Thus the priest sacrificed Christ anew for the forgiveness of sins. In this system of mass, confession, and absolution the priest became the mediator between God and the people.

Solus Christus or "Christ Alone" is perhaps the linchpin of Reformation theology. It stands against the system which presumes that Christ must be re-sacrificed for the sins of the people. *Solus Christus* is why priests, or "little Christs" serving as mediators between the people and God were replaced by pastors who served simply to proclaim the word of Christ. It is because of *Solus Christus* that the Reformers replaced the altars of sacrifice in the church with a table for communion. There is no need for the intercession of saints for Christ is our heavenly intercessor, the one Mediator between God and man. There is no need for Mary as a Co-Redemptress for Christ alone is our Redeemer. And it is because of the sufficiency of Christ alone that we are able to have confidence that sinners are justified by grace alone through faith alone.

Main Idea: All of the blessings of salvation were achieved by and are granted through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone.

1. In Christ alone God gives us a new perspective.

Vs. 16 – "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer."

- The phrase, "according to the flesh", means "by the world's standards: race, socio-economic position, education, title, gender, etc." The only thing of importance to Paul is whether one is "in Christ" (and thus a new creation) or "not in Christ". We do not regard people on the basis of their income, ethnicity, political affiliation or any other worldly category. We are to regard people as fellow image-bearers of God who need the salvation that is found in Christ alone.

2. In Christ alone God makes us new creations.

Vs. 17 – “Therefore if any man is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

- The "new birth" or being "born again" (John 3:3) does not mean merely the mending of one's ways, the changing of bad habits, embracing a new list of do's and don'ts. It refers to a radical, pervasive spiritual re-creation of the inner being. Theologians refer to the new birth as *regeneration*.
- Paul's language here of a "new creation" is an allusion to the "new heaven and new earth" of Rev. 21-22. Simply put, the glory of the age to come has impinged upon or broken into the present. Our rebirth is a foretaste of the new creation in the age to come.
- What are the "old things" that "passed away" when we were born again? Among other things, he would include godless, selfish living, "according to the flesh" living, enmity against God, hardened minds, calloused hearts of unbelief, etc. The "new things" that have come include justification, new life, forgiveness, adoption, hope, joy, wisdom, knowledge of God, etc.

3. In Christ alone God grants us a new status.

Vv. 18-21 – “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself...”

* Background – The Corinthian church had the bad habit of rejecting the authority and ministry of the apostles (particularly Paul) in favor of so-called “super apostles” (an equivalent of our modern health and wealth preachers). So a major purpose of Paul's epistles to the Corinthian church is to assert his apostleship. This is not a vanity project for Paul. The apostles were appointed by Jesus himself for the purpose of establishing his church upon his gospel and authority. So to reject the Lord's apostles was to reject the Lord and his gospel as Jesus makes clear in Matthew 25:31ff. So the reference to “ambassadors” of Christ here is not generally applied to all Christians (although all Christians are certainly representatives of Christ). In this passage, however, Paul is referring to the unique role and authority of the apostles as those through whom Jesus makes his appeal to be reconciled to God. To this day Christians proclaim, not our own message, but the apostolic message of the gospel. The point of application for all believers in this text is that of being *reconciled* to God through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Reconciled

- At His own initiative, God removes that which is the cause of His anger against us, namely, our sin. He removes the cause of spiritual alienation by transferring His wrath against us to a proper substitute.
- Reconciliation refers to the activity of God whereby his enmity or wrath against sinners is consumed by another, namely, our substitute the Lord Jesus Christ. Reconciliation, therefore, is the restoration of harmony by the removal of whatever was the cause of alienation (i.e., our sin).
- This reconciling work...
 - a) is wholly of God - vs. 18a – “All this is from God...”
 - b) is a finished work - vs. 18b – “who through Christ *reconciled* us to himself...”
 - c) is appropriated through believing the gospel – vs. 20 – “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us...”
 - d) is guaranteed through imputation – vs. 21 – “He made him to be sin who knew no sin...”

The Doctrine of Imputation

Adam's Sin	Imputed to us	= Original Sin
Our Sin	Imputed to Christ	= Atonement
Christ's Righteousness	Imputed to Us	= Justification