



The Five Reformation Principles

Study 4: Solus Christus (Col 1:9-18)

o The doctrine of “solus Christus” states that salvation for fallen man is provided by God in Jesus Christ alone, the Mediator who offered up Himself as the substitute for His people to bear the punishment of their sins, and was resurrected to give them new life and reconciliation with God.

I. Recovery of the doctrine.

1. The first issue countered by this doctrine is the RC denial that Jesus Christ is alone the Mediator between God and men (cf. 1 Tim 2:5).
 - The RC Church teaches the necessity of the priesthood to administer the sacraments, thereby ministering grace to the people.
 - The RC Church also teaches that the souls of the departed held in purgatory are helped by the intercession of the faithful, prayer to the saints for them, and the veneration of religious relics.
 - The Reformers, starting with Martin Luther, taught “the priesthood of all believers”, meaning that believers may draw near to God in worship, without the mediation of human priests. Christ, our High Priest, has finished His work of salvation and is interceding for His people in heaven (Heb 9:11-15; 10:19-22). This does not undermine the roles of ministers who teach the word of God and administer the special ordinances.
2. The second issue countered by this doctrine is the RC teaching that Christ’s death on the cross must be supplemented by the sacraments, without which there will be no salvation. A person must be baptised by a priest of the RC Church, confess their sins to the priest, attend the mass, etc. in order to be saved.
 - Not only does the RC teaching deny salvation by grace, through faith in Christ, but it also denies the sufficiency of Christ’s death to make atonement for sin.
 - The Reformers, however, taught that salvation was by Christ’s work alone. John Calvin spoke representatively: “Our acquittal is in this — that the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isa 53:12). We must specially remember this substitution in order that we may not be all our lives in trepidation and anxiety, as if the just vengeance, which the Son of God transferred to himself, were still impending over us.” (Inst:Bk 2:16:439).
3. Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), or Petrarch, was an Italian scholar and clergyman. He is considered the “Father of Humanism”, a philosophy that sparked off the Renaissance. The Renaissance was the period of great revival in art, literature and learning in European history between the 14th and 17th centuries. It paved the way for the Reformation of the 16th century.

- During the Renaissance, it was widely believed that natural revelation was sufficient to lead us to know God and, therefore, Christ was not the only way of salvation.
- Here again, John Calvin spoke representatively: “When we see that the whole sum of our salvation, and every single part of it, are comprehended in Christ, we must beware of deriving even the the minutest portion of it from any other quarter.” (Inst: Bk 2:16:452).
- The 1689 Confession states this concerning Christ who is the only Saviour for sinners: “This promise of Christ and the salvation which comes by Him, is revealed only by the word of God. The works of creation and providence with the light of nature do not reveal Christ or His grace even in a general or obscure way. How much less, therefore, can those who are devoid of the revelation of Christ by the promise (or the gospel) be enabled by the light of nature to arrive at saving faith or repentance.” (1689:20:2)
- The 1689 Confessions states this concerning Christ who is alone the Mediator: “This office of Mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is the Prophet, Priest, and King of the church of God, and this office may not be transferred from Him to any other, either in whole or in part.” (1689:8:9)

II. Implications of the doctrine.

1. We have noted how liberalism arose in Germany and affected the churches worldwide in the early 20th century. Liberal scholars embraced the “higher criticism” approach to the study of the Bible, while rationalism and “the theory of evolution” of Charles Darwin were gripping the minds of many.
 - A liberal theologian, Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), propagated the idea of “the universal fatherhood of God” and “the universal brotherhood of man” (a belief also held by the secretive religious society called Freemasonry). Today, this same idea has been resurrected in Universalism, i.e. the idea that all good people will be saved regardless of their faith, and that all roads lead to heaven.
 - The Bible teaches the universal creatorhood of God (Acts 17:28) and the universal neighbourhood of men (Luke 10:25-37). Only those who know Jesus Christ as Saviour know the true God (John 1:12-13; 14:6).
2. The doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers”, like all correct doctrines, can be misunderstood, misapplied, or abused. Rightly understood, it means that those who are in Christ have the right to draw near to God in worship, to serve Him, and to interpret the Scripture without the intervention of a human priest (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; Eph 4:16-17; Matt 20:25-27).
 - This doctrine is abused when it is claimed that all views are equally valid, that there is no need for teachers of the word in the church, and that we may serve God in ways contrary to the teaching of Scripture and bypassing the local church (cf Acts 13:1-3; 14:27).
3. Jesus Christ as the only Mediator between God and man, and the only Head of the church, holds the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. We should, therefore, not focus on His priesthood to the exclusion of His other offices.
 - The truth that Christ holds the three offices was taught by John Calvin (Inst:Bk 2:Ch 15). The Puritans developed on this doctrine, e.g. John Owen (Works 16:Vol 1:85-100).
 - In the 1689 Confession (1689:Ch 8:10), it is stated that “This number and order of offices is essential (or necessary).” This clause came from the 1644/46 Confession. It shows that the Particular Baptists were in advance of the other Puritans in their understanding of the practical importance of the offices of Christ. The work of reformation involves bringing

every facet of church life under the headship of Christ, which encompasses the three offices.

= Believing in “solus Christus” does not diminish our worship of, and service to, the Triune God but enhances our desire to glorify God alone.

Review Questions

1. Define “solus Christus”.
2. What is the meaning of “the priesthood of all believers” as taught by the Reformers?
3. In salvation, what is *synergism* and what is *monergism*?
4. What is the second issue countered by “solus Christus”?
5. What was the Renaissance?
6. What was widely believed during the Renaissance?
7. What idea was propagated by the liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack?
8. What is the idea propagated by Adolf von Harnack known as today?
9. In contrast to the idea propagated by Adolf von Harnack, what does the Bible teach?
10. What offices does Christ hold as Mediator between God and man and as Head of the church?

Assignment/Discussion

Consider how the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” may be abused. How would you counter those abuses?

Memory Passage (Col 1:15-18)

15 He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.
