

# The Five Solas—Solus Christus—Christ Alone

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Continuing the series in the Five Solas, this is the second of our presentations. There doesn't seem to be any consistency in the order in which they are considered, except that usually Sola Scriptura is first and Soli Deo Gloria is last. The other three vary in the order in which people handle them, and in one sense the order is not vital because they stand together. However, in another sense, Solus Christus is central to the five. The scriptures consistently point us to Christ: faith is faith in Christ alone: grace is God's undeserved kindness in bringing us to Christ: salvation brings glory to God because it puts Christ in his rightful place as Head over all things. Although all of the 'Solas' were used by the Reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the five-fold grouping as we know it today didn't really take shape until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Having got rid of three-quarters of my books three years ago when we moved into an apartment, I have been somewhat lacking in resources. However, I did purchase one book to which I am much indebted. Zondervan has recently published a series on the Five Solas edited by Matthew Barrett. They are written by well-known and much valued authors. The volume on Solus Christus was written by Stephen Wellum and I have gratefully drawn from his material.

I recently looked at a website entitled Catholic Bible 101. They looked at the five solas from a Catholic perspective, and denied each one. Of course they think highly of the scriptures, of grace, of faith, of Christ and of the glory of God. Their problem was with the solas. They agree that salvation is through Christ, but they also stress the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the sacraments and good works. As far as the work of the Spirit is concerned, we would agree. Indeed we recognize that salvation is a Trinitarian work, with the Father planning salvation, the Son accomplishing redemption through his death and the Holy Spirit applying the work to the hearts of God's chosen people. The main area where we differ from Catholics is that we insist that Christ alone secures our salvation without the help of sacraments or of our good works.

We will note first how Christ alone fulfils the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, second how Christ alone is able to bring salvation; and thirdly how Christ is to be preached as the only Saviour

## **1. Christ alone is the one who was promised as Saviour and who fulfils those promises.**

Who is this person we refer to as the Christ, or Messiah? What is his place in God's plan of salvation? We ask this because when the Reformers referred to the five solas, they used them because they all pointed in one direction—to salvation. The scriptures describe the way of salvation in a story line from the beginning to the end of the Bible. Faith has to do with the appropriation and experience of salvation. Grace is God's undeserved kindness in saving us. The glory referred to is glory with regard to God's work of salvation, and of course Christ is appreciated primarily because he procures salvation for us.

Salvation implies some kind of trouble. The term means nothing unless we are in difficulty. If we are sitting peacefully on our veranda, we don't need to be saved, but if we are drowning or trapped in a burning building then we need someone to save us. The trouble from which God saves us is of course, sin. God's plan of salvation for the human race implies that the human race is in a state of sin, and Christ as the Saviour saves from sin. Jesus was given his name (which

means God saves) because he would save his people from their sins (Mt.1:21). Salvation further implies that we cannot save ourselves or else there would be no need for Christ to come into this world at all.

So when we think of the uniqueness of Christ, we are focussing on his work of salvation from sin and of his suitability and his qualifications to be a Saviour. Of this the scriptures are replete, and we need to begin there. Twice in Luke 24 Jesus spent time teaching separate groups of his disciples about the many references to himself in the Old Testament. With the two on the Emmaus Road, we read:

*. . . beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* (Lk.24:27)

Then later the same day, to the larger group in Jerusalem, he said:

*These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.* (Lk.24:44)

These prophecies had their beginning immediately after the fall. Remarkably the first one was addressed to the serpent:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.* (Gen.3:15)

We refer to this verse as the *protevangelium*, which means the first gospel. Derek Kidner calls it the ‘first glimpse of the gospel.’ It certainly is not a full-blown exposition of what we call the gospel today, but it does promise that at some time a descendent of the woman will conquer Satan, though this descendent (seed) will suffer harm in bringing that about. What the promise meant to Adam and Eve we do not know, but the promise must have been handed down from generation to generation, and then from the time of Abraham it was renewed by the Lord and enlarged upon. Obviously it narrowed down also. The promise regarding Eve was pretty broad—her special descendent would come from the human race. That was certainly reduced in the time of the flood, as only Noah’s family was left. With Abraham, when the population had grown again, it was narrowed down to his family, and then there were repetitions of the promise to Isaac and Jacob. A further narrowing of the field came with the choice of Judah from Jacob’s sons (Gen.49:8-10). Following that there was the establishment of the Jewish nation in Moses’ time and the promises clearly applied within that nation. After the kingship was established in David’s family there was a continuing Messianic line until the last king, Zedekiah and then the Jews were carried away to Babylon. The line continued however, down to Joseph, as we are shown in Matthew 1.

It is hard to say how significant these genealogies were to the average Israelite, but during the times of the prophets, and you could include David there too, the promises of the coming Messiah became clearer. Many of the details were factual, such as his birthplace (Mic.5:2), the virgin birth (Isa.7:14), his entrance into Jerusalem riding on a donkey ((Zech.9:9), and even the approximate time of his coming in the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. We cannot doubt that Christ fulfilled all these prophecies: (Mt.2:1-12, Mt.1:18-25, Mt.21:1-5). The seventy week prophecy may not have NT proof of fulfilment, but it does fit the time frame. Notice also the prophecy of his ministry in Isaiah 61:1:

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;*

Jesus himself drew attention to the fact that he was fulfilling that prediction (Lk.4:18-21).

There were also the prophecies regarding his death and resurrection. Psalms 22 and 69 have very clear references to Jesus' sufferings, even down to the words uttered on the cross (Ps.22:1). However nowhere are the details and purpose of his death clearer than in Isaiah 53:

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (v.4-6)

These words are spoken of one described as the Servant of the Lord, who appears in several passages beginning in chapter 42. Not only did the Servant suffer and die (verse 9 in chapter 53 speaks of his death), but those sufferings were substitutionary: *he bore **our** griefs and carried **our** sorrows; he was pierced for **our** transgressions; he was crushed for **our** iniquities. **Our** sins were laid on him—by the Lord himself. See also verse 12: *he bore the sin of many*. Also his sufferings were salvific: they brought peace and healing.*

Another remarkable thing in this chapter is that the sufferings of the Servant were not only at the hands of wicked men, they fulfilled God's purposes:

*. . . it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief* (v.10)

We should note that the resurrection or exaltation of the Servant is also spoken of here:

*Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.* (ch.52:13)

*Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.* (ch.53:12)

Psalm 16:10 also speaks of the resurrection, and is quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:26-32).

Not only did Christ fulfil these prophecies—no one else could have fulfilled them. Christ alone fulfilled them. Most certainly no-one else could have suffered and died for our sins and risen again.

Turning to other significant matters regarding the person of Christ, we come to the three-fold office of the Messiah—prophet, priest and king.

His prophetic office was spelled out plainly in Deuteronomy 18:15:

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

Jesus made numerous prophecies during his earthly ministry, but Peter specifically declared that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Deuteronomy passage in Acts 3:22-26.

Regarding his priestly office, note Psalm 110:4:

*The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."*

The writer to the Hebrews gives considerable space to show that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy in chapters 5, 6 and 7. He also deals with his priesthood elsewhere in the book.

As to his kingship, let's note two OT passages:

*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;* (Ps.45:6)

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.* (Isa.9:6,7)

As to the fulfilment of this we simply note the large amount of material regarding Jesus' kingdom in the Gospels, and he did specifically acknowledge that he was a king to Pilate (Jn.18:36,37). (See also 1 Cor.15:25). Christ not only occupied the three-fold office of prophet, priest and king: Christ alone occupied it. No one else could possibly take those roles.

We must ask, why did Christ need to occupy that three-fold office? From early church times there was a recognition of the importance of Christ's three-fold office. Wellum quotes Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4<sup>th</sup> century) who refers to Christ as: *the only High Priest of all, the only King of every creature, and the Father's only High Prophet of prophets* (Wellum p.127). However, it was Calvin and his theological heirs who developed the thought. The offices were vital roles in Jesus' ministry.

A prophet brings a message from God to the people for which they are accountable. Jesus certainly did that. Much of the space in the Gospels is given to Jesus' teaching. Not only did he quote OT passages, but he spoke with his own authority. For example in the Sermon on the Mount, several times he said: *You have heard . . . but I say unto you* (Mt.5:21,22, 27,28, 31,32, 33,34, 38,39). He spoke of God and his character: he spoke of salvation: he spoke of the world to come. We might add, he spoke as no one else could or did. The officers who went to arrest Jesus quite early in his ministry returned empty handed saying: *'No one ever spoke like this man'* (Jn.7:46).

We will refer again later to Jesus' priestly ministry, but this was central to his accomplishments. Earthly priests offered sacrifices for the people, Jesus offered himself as one final sacrifice for sins. He was both the priest who offered the sacrifice and the sacrifice offered. As our High Priest he also continues to make intercession for us (Heb.7:25).

Jesus was and still is a king. What is the role of a king? To rule: to exercise authority over a territory and people. As prophet, Jesus tells us what God requires of us, and as king he enforces

those requirements, but also protects us. The Shorter Catechism puts it well. In answering the question, ‘How does Christ execute the office of a king?’ it says:

*Christ executes the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.* (Question 26)

It was God’s plan to set up a kingdom with Christ as the King. Contrary to the expectation of some of the disciples, it was not an earthly kingdom with geographical borders, but was a spiritual, and inward kingdom. (See Lk.17:20,21, Jn.18:36). While the inauguration of the kingdom was within the earthly life-time of Jesus, the kingdom would grow and eventually be a universal kingdom. Daniel 2 shows the growth of the kingdom; the superiority over all earthly kingdoms, and the eternal nature of the kingdom. Note especially verse 44:

*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.*

With all three of these offices, only Christ could have fulfilled and occupied them.

Turning to even weightier matters and areas where Christ’s unique position is even more exclusive, we come to his nature and character as the God-man. These days virtually no one will dispute Jesus’ humanity: it is for his deity that we often have to contend; but it is interesting that in the early days of the church, the Gnostics disputed his humanity, while having no problem with his deity. To them only what was spiritual could be good: what was physical was evil. That meant that Jesus could not have had a body. He only ‘seemed’ to have one. While different emphases and different errors have appeared at various times, the fact remains that both the deity and humanity of Jesus must be defended, for both are crucial. Thus we see how important it is to see Christ as the God-man, the incarnate Son of God.

Christ’s deity is declared in many places. We used Isaiah 9:6 to show the nature of his kingdom, but it also declares his deity. One of the names in that verse is ‘the Mighty God.’ Also in Isaiah 7:14, the one to be born of the virgin was Immanuel, which means, as Matthew tells us, God with us (Mt.1:23). In the NT, no passage is clearer than John 1:1:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Here we see the deity of the Word—he was God, but we also see that he is a person distinct from God—he was with God. The doctrine of the Trinity is vital to Christianity, and there are many NT passages to help us understand this mystery. We have to be honest and admit that the doctrine was not clearly revealed in the OT, yet there are certainly hints, and there is nothing to contradict the doctrine. Even in Genesis 1 there are suggestive statements. We have God creating the heavens and earth and then the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters (v.1,2). Later, in verse 26 we have the use of ‘us’ and ‘our’. We reiterate, this doesn’t give us a full-blown doctrine of the Trinity, but it is suggestive of a plurality of divine persons.

We might add that although Genesis 1:1 simply says that God created the heavens and the earth, several NT passages make it clear that it was specifically Christ who created. We’ll just quote two:

*All things were made through him [Christ], and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (Jn.1:3)

*For by him [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* (Col.1:16)

So the deity of the coming Messiah was clearly stated.

As to Christ's humanity, it is more difficult to come up with specific OT verses that prove this. We could simply conclude that as the Messiah would be a descendent of the woman, of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David etc. we would naturally expect him to be human. Certainly there is nothing contrary to this in either Testament. In the NT there are passages that speak of his body (Lk.24:39), of bodily weakness such as tiredness (Jn.4:6), hunger (Mt.4:2) and thirst (Jn.19:28). What is important is to see how his deity and humanity come together, and this involves the incarnation. This is of course hinted at in the OT in such verses as Isa.7:14, but it is necessary to look at NT revelation to get a clear picture. We need go no farther than John 1 for a clear statement. After the declaration we have already quoted in the first verse that the Word was with God (distinct) and yet was God (identity), in verse 14 the apostle writes:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The one who was God became flesh. He took on human form. He did not cease to be God, but he added humanity to his deity and became the God-man. This is one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith—one person with two natures. He was distinctly God and distinctly man, yet with two natures residing in one person. Stephen Wellum also connects the incarnation with his sonship. He was the incarnate son of God. That was stated in the second psalm, verse 7:

*You are my Son; today I have begotten you.*

It is interesting that in Acts 13 Paul connects that with the resurrection (verse 33). Note also Roman 1:4:

*[He] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead,*

Some, James Dunn for example, have used these verses to deny the eternal sonship of Christ. Dunn argues that they teach that Jesus' divine sonship should be viewed 'principally as a role and status he had entered upon, been appointed to, at his resurrection.' (Quoted by Wellum p.87). Thomas Schreiner prefers to think that the Son reigned with the Father from all eternity, but as a result of his incarnation and atoning work he was appointed to be the Son of God as one who was now both God and man. (Quoted by Wellum p.87). It does seem that there was a new status from the resurrection.

Clearly Jesus was eternally God, the second Person of the Trinity. There can also be no doubt that he was viewed as the Son of God from his incarnation. He consistently addressed God as his Father, and referred to him in that way. His relationship to the Father was absolutely unique. He was the only Son (Jn.3:16). The sinless Son. At his baptism he was identified by the Father as the

beloved Son with whom he was well pleased (Mt.3:17). His being the Son did not mean that he had a beginning: the term refers to his relationship to the Father, and also to his being heir. Theologians speak of his eternal generation, a term I find it hard to get my mind around. Such an expression may be found in books of theology but I do not see it in scripture.

Another expression, or title that is frequently used of Jesus is **Son of man**. He often uses it of himself. Some would simply see it as a description of his humanity, but it is not that simple. We need to trace it from its use in the OT. To be sure it was used of man, often in poetic parallelism, for example in Psalm 8:4:

*what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?*

The prophet Ezekiel is also addressed as ‘Son of man’ several times (e.g. ch.2:1). It seems to indicate not only his manhood, but his distinct position as God’s spokesman.

But in Daniel 7 we see a very significant use of the term:

*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.* (v.13,14)

Here the son of man is closely linked with the Ancient of Days. He is given glory and a kingdom that is everlasting. Clearly this is a Messianic reference. Jesus’ use of the title would appear then to be more than just a term describing his manhood, but a fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy and therefore Messianic.

Another thing we need to grasp—Jesus became the God-man at his incarnation, and he will maintain that two-fold nature forever. Of course he was God eternally: but he was not human eternally. To be sure there were theophanies or Christophanies in the OT, but these were temporary. His humanity began at a point in time, from the incarnation, and presumably that was actually from his conception. But having taken humanity to himself he will possess that nature forever. He rose from the dead with a body; he ascended with a body (Acts 1) and the angels in that chapter indicated that he would return in the same manner (v.11). The book of Revelation indicates that Jesus possesses his body in heaven, and moreover that he still has the marks of his crucifixion. We know he rose with those marks (Jn.21:24-27), and in Revelation 5:6 he is portrayed as a lamb looking *as though it had been slain*. This seems to suggest that Jesus will forever bear the marks of his suffering—an eternal reminder of the cost of our redemption.

As far as the uniqueness of Jesus’ nature there can be no doubt. He alone was God incarnate. He alone was the God-man. He alone was the one qualified and suitable to be the Saviour of sinners.

This brings us to our second main section where we will see:

## 2. That Christ is the only Saviour.

That excludes all others. It excludes Buddha; it excludes Confucius; it excludes Muhammad, as well as Muhammad's god Allah. You can add whatever names you like to the list.

Of course in a post-modern society this is considered arrogant. Who are we to claim that our religion is the only correct one? We are told that Christianity may be suitable for us, but we must not press our views on others. Religion, if we feel a need for it, is a matter of personal choice, but we must never dare to insist that ours is the only way. We will begin our defense of the position by quoting Peter's words:

*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12)

'No other name under heaven.' That is pretty exclusive. It doesn't seem to leave room for anyone else. Then there is the claim of our Lord himself:

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* (John 14:6)

These words are clear; they exclude all other saviours. The statements are sufficient for the true believer, although they will not convince the sceptic. Why does the Christian faith exclude all others? We would approach this by affirming that there is no other means for the forgiveness of sins.

This is something overlooked in most world religions. Many years ago, Harry Ironside examined 24 volumes considered authoritative by various world religions, and concluded among other things, that in no religion except Christianity was there any means of cleansing from sin. Of course to see the need of forgiveness, there must first be an awareness of sin. J.I. Packer points out in his excellent book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, that the gospel must begin not with Christ, or even with the declaration of sin, but with the character of God. We need to see him as Creator, and as a holy God who has made us, who tells us what is pleasing to him, and holds us accountable for our behaviour. It is only in that light that people will see their guilt and seek forgiveness.

In most world religions there are standards to be achieved, but the best people can hope for is that their good deeds will out-weigh their bad deeds. In Islam, for example there are plenty of threats and curses against sinners in the Koran(Quran). The only way of salvation is a belief in Allah, commitment to Islam and the hope that somehow Allah will overlook their sins, but there is no sure hope or means of forgiveness.

Surely we need a better hope than the possibility of God overlooking our sins. Our sins are real: they are numerous, and we need the assurance that they will be forgiven. An arbitrary overlooking of sin ignores justice. Closely connected with God's holiness is his justice. God has given us his laws. The principle of law implies first a lawgiver; secondly those subject to those laws; thirdly the statutes to which people are accountable; and fourthly sanctions. Laws mean nothing without sanctions. Take the example of traffic laws. How safe would our roads be if the speed limits were never upheld? How safe would our streets be if the laws against murder and violence were never enforced? We may sometimes feel that our streets and roads are not very safe, but imagine what they would be like without sanctions. Justice is a necessary handmaiden of law, and God's justice is a necessary handmaiden of his holiness.



When we grasp this, we see the necessity of sin being properly dealt with. A just God cannot merely overlook sin. When I was in the military I committed a serious offence, basically being AWOL. Upon returning to my unit I was arrested together with a group of others who had committed the same offence. We spent a few nervous hours pondering the future. Later the same day, we were called together and told that we were very lucky people because the company commander had decided to let us off. We were very much relieved, but the company commander's actions ignored justice. We were guilty and could have expected quite a stiff sentence.

On occasions when preaching on God's justice, I have used this illustration, and made the point that God could not act in that way. He cannot just let us off. Sinners must be called to account, and sin must be punished. That's what the cross was all about. It wasn't a matter of Jesus being a martyr, but of him paying the penalty for sin—not his own sins but the sins of his people.

Thus we see the necessity of the cross for our salvation. Salvation is salvation from sin, including salvation from its guilt. When Paul said that he was determined to know nothing while he was among the Corinthians '*except Jesus Christ and him crucified*' (1 Cor.2:2), he was not being sentimental about the cross; rather he knew that apart from the cross there was no salvation.

People are slow to grasp that message. Even Peter could not see the necessity of Jesus' death before that death occurred. When Jesus spoke of his coming death, Peter responded: '*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.*' (Mt.16:22). As far as Jesus was concerned, that was satanic thinking (v.23).

Peter's view (thankfully temporary) has been repeated throughout church history. There has been the denial of the necessity of Jesus' death. What is in question here is **penal substitution**. There has always been among orthodox believers the connection between Christ's death and forgiveness, but the waters have sometimes been muddied. It wasn't really until the Reformation that penal substitution was clearly declared in terms of the necessity of the cross.

Some, for example Socinus, denied the necessity of the cross. He taught that God could forgive sin without atonement, and that Christ's death was not necessary for our justification before God. Others, like Arminius and Grotius tried to take a middle way (via media) between Socinus and the Reformers. They taught the 'hypothetical necessity' of the cross. God chose to bring salvation through the cross, but he could have used other means to achieve it.

When Paul was preaching at Thessalonica, we read that:

*he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."* (Acts 17:2,3)

This was not a 'hypothetical necessity' but an absolute necessity.

Let's return to our consideration of penal substitution. This is of course an aspect of Christ's priestly ministry. Penal means that sin must bear its penalty—there must be punishment for it. If we took that punishment we would be forever lost, but Jesus came as our substitute, bore our sins and died for us, taking the punishment that should have been ours. At the cross, Jesus bore our sin (1 Pet.2:24), our sin was laid on him (Isa.53:6) and he was punished for it. He was our substitute: our sacrifice. He was the Lamb of God. There was no other way to deal with sin. We can be sure that if there was any other way—a way that could have spared his Son the awful

suffering he endured, an all-wise God would have devised it. So when we think of what is required to bring about cleansing from sin, who else but Jesus could have procured it?

Think for a moment of what was required for such a substitute:

- (a) He would have to be without sin himself or else he would be punished for his own sins and not those of others.
- (b) He would have to possess a nature able to die and bear those sins and suffer for them.
- (c) He would also have to be able to rise again from the dead, otherwise his work of salvation would not be complete—there would be no proof that he had accomplished redemption and that the Father accepted his work.

Who else but Jesus could achieve that? Could Muhammad have died for sinners to bring about forgiveness and salvation? Could Confucius? Could anyone? That is why Christians are not ashamed to claim that there is no salvation in any other. Let's expand those three points:

- (a) Jesus had to be without sin. This was prefigured in the sacrifices, which consistently had to be 'without blemish' (Lev.1:3 etc. etc.). Of course the blemishes there were physical—no visible defects, but clearly the requirement prefigured Jesus' perfection. See 1 Peter 1:18,19:

*. . . you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

The New Testament tells us very plainly that Jesus was without sin;

*Who [Jesus] knew no sin'* (2 Cor.5:21)

*Our great high priest . . . 'In every respect has been tempted as we are, yet was without sin.'* (Heb.4:15)

(See also:2 Cor. 5:21, Heb.7:26)

A priest in the Old Testament had to offer sacrifices *'first for his own sins and then for those of the people.'* (Heb.7:27), but Jesus had *'no need'* to do that as he was sinless (same verse). Having no sins of his own to atone for, his sacrifice—himself, was offered on behalf of others. No Jewish high priest could ever do that. No one could do that unless he were sinless. Jesus claimed to be without sin (Jn.8:46), the scriptures confirmed it and his life proved it. He was therefore qualified to be our sacrifice and our substitute.

- (b) Jesus had to have a human nature in order to identify with mankind and die—note especially Hebrews 2:14-17:

*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a*

*merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

He also needed a divine nature to be able to bear our sins. Who else could bear the weight and punishment for sin without himself being destroyed or rather punished eternally in hell? We have already considered the necessity and proof of Jesus' humanity and deity.

(c) To complete the work of redemption there had to be a resurrection. If Jesus had only died, there could be no satisfaction on the part of the Father. The resurrection was essential for that. Paul makes it clear that the resurrection is a vital part of the gospel:

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*

(1 Cor.15:1-3)

*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

(1 Cor.15:12-17)

No resurrection—no gospel: no salvation: no forgiveness. We normally think of the resurrection as the work of God the Father, which it is (Acts 2:24, 3:15). In a sense we could speak of the resurrection as God's 'amen' to the finished work of Christ: but Jesus also speaks of his own involvement in the resurrection:

*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*

(Jn.10:17,18)

Who else could say that they have power both to lay down their life and to take it up again?

The New Testament is consistent in stressing the resurrection alongside the death of Jesus. if you analyze the messages recorded in Acts, most of them extracts or summaries of sermons, you will find that there are at least as many references to the resurrection as there are to the death of Jesus. Of course, both are essential, but it shows the importance of the resurrection. Note also Romans 4:25:

*. . . who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

This seems to indicate that the resurrection was the completion or confirmation of Christ's atoning work. Of course in both the Old and New Testaments there were examples of people

being raised from the dead, but those people would have died again. Only Jesus rose from the dead never to die again. No one else could do that.

We stress again that Christ alone could purchase redemption. Christ alone could bring salvation. Christ alone could reconcile us to God. Christ alone could act as our mediator:

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.* (1 Tim.2:5,6)

Let me conclude with one other important truth:

### **3. Christ is to be proclaimed as the only Saviour**

So how are we to preach Christ as the only Saviour? Certainly in our evangelistic preaching we need to make it clear as to how our hearers can know this Saviour. When we preach the Word in the church, mainly to God's people, unbelievers will often be present, and the truths we have earlier presented in this paper may be helpful to them—God is able to use his Word as he sees fit; but as a general rule we need to challenge those unbelievers specifically. Preaching is the application of truth to the conscience, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out in *Preaching and Preachers*. I might say at this point that we ought to have the unconverted in mind every time we preach. I don't mean that every sermon should be exclusively evangelistic, though I think it is a good practice to preach evangelistically quite often. Believers should never object to being reminded of these great truths, and unbelievers certainly need to hear them. I was saddened a few years ago to hear a preacher admit that he never addressed the unconverted—and he wasn't a hypercalvinist! Even though most of our sermons will be mainly for the benefit of Christians, I believe there should always be an arrow or two directed to the unsaved.

The unbeliever needs to be directed to Christ as the only Saviour, but also the all-sufficient Saviour, and the only object of faith. I remember talking to a woman several years ago and asking her if she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. She assured me that she did. I then asked her if she was confident of going in heaven. She replied that she didn't know if she was good enough to go to heaven. Evidently her faith in Christ was not faith in Christ alone.

That error affects many Christians at some time. They claim to trust in Christ alone for their salvation, but what gives them that assurance? If they are honest, their good works contribute largely to that. Let's imagine what is hopefully a normal day for a brother: he gets up early and has a blessed time with the Lord in his devotions. He does well in his job and is commended by the boss. At lunch time there is an opportunity to witness to someone who shows a lot of interest. The rest of the day goes well and that night he thanks the Lord for the assurance of being a child of God.

The next day, things are very different: he sleeps in and has no time for devotions. He is late for work and in his haste he gets a speeding ticket. He makes mistakes at work and is reprimanded by the boss. Then he loses his temper with the person he had witnessed to yesterday. That night as he prays he wonders if he has any right to consider himself a Christian. Is he trusting in Christ alone, or in Christ plus his good behaviour? It's easy for any of us to fall into this trap. Of course we don't excuse our sin, but it is very easy to have the mindset where assurance is proportional to good behaviour. We do need to preach to ourselves as well as those before us in the services.

When we do preach to our people we need to preach Christ. That doesn't mean we never preach on any other topic, but our preaching should be Christ-centred. We earlier quoted Paul's words to the Corinthians:

*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*  
(1 Cor.2:2)

That cannot mean that Paul never preached on any other topic but Christ and the cross. In his letters he spoke of many other things: Jewish history; Christian ethics; the world to come, unity etc. What did Paul mean then? Let me suggest two things; first that the cross was Paul's favourite theme: his chief theme. He reveled in it: nothing gave him greater pleasure than to speak about Christ and his atoning death. Whenever he could, he directed his preaching along that line.

But I think there is another way of looking at that—everything Paul preached or taught could be extrapolated to the cross. If it was Old Testament prophecy, he traced it forward to Christ. If it was temple ritual, he would show the fulfilment in Christ's sacrifice. In terms of the Christian life, everything flowed out of Christ's sacrificial death and gratitude to him. When Paul spoke of heaven, he saw it as the fulfilment of God's eternal plan in Christ. The life of a believer is not just a New Testament form of Mosaic law, it is related to Christ. The apostle was not under Moses' law but Christ's (1 Cor.9:21).

This is important—not only do we need to understand the uniqueness of Christ and his redemptive work, we need to make it known to others, and, I might add, we need to preach as if Christ were unique and precious to us. We may love our theology, and delight to proclaim the great truths of the gospel, especially the great truths of the reformed faith; but do we love to preach Christ? Most young men emerging from seminary are eager to preach the doctrines they have learned, often to preach them all in every sermon! However, while the congregation may initially appreciate being taught so much doctrine, the novelty will wear off after a while if their hearts are not warmed and blessed by hearing of Christ and being drawn closer to him.

When we prepare our sermons we need to ask ourselves if we will be preaching Christ, and presenting him in such a way that people will admire him. A good assessment of that can be made by asking ourselves if we are being drawn closer to Christ during our preparation. Ultimately brothers, it is not our theology that must be set forth, but Christ. I am not advocating non-doctrinal preaching, but preaching that uses our doctrine to present and exalt our Saviour.

Many of our people go through stressful times—at work, sometimes in the home or in the community. They need encouraging. To be sure they need to be challenged as well, and sometimes they need to be rebuked, but above all they need to be lifted up: to have their hearts warmed, and to be drawn closer to the Saviour. I remember many years ago when Geoff Thomas was the speaker at our pastors' conference. We had asked him to speak on Power in Preaching. One of his messages was: 'Powerful preaching is encouraging preaching.' How true!

One other matter I would touch upon. I could easily have included this in one of the earlier sections, but it will do here. As Christians we still sin and we need an advocate. Christ is the only advocate we have and the only one we need. When we have turned to the Saviour and are truly converted, our goal should be to live holy and obedient lives. As John writes:

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* (1 Jn.2:1,2)

The command is to live without sin: the goal is to live without sin. The only alternative is to have as our goal, that we do sin. We must aim at sinlessness. However, the reality is, that we fail—all of us. We may preach the importance of holiness repeatedly, and we need to, but we also need to help believers deal with the guilt that comes from sin. We also need to deal with our own guilt. As we said earlier we too often allow our behaviour to determine our assurance, as many Christians do. The apostle was well aware of this problem, but he was a wise counsellor, and his words need to be engraved in stone: *But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* The way to deal with our sin as believers, is not to deny it or make excuses for it, nor to remind the Lord that we have had better days, but to come to Christ as our advocate. A large part of Satan's work is acting as the 'accuser of the brothers' (Rev.12:10), and the chief way to overcome him is by 'the blood of the Lamb' (v.11). The setting of these verses in John is really a court room. We are brought before the Judge of all the earth accused of sin. The counsel for the prosecution is the devil. The counsel for the defence is the Lord Jesus Christ—our advocate. Satan accuses: Jesus defends. Who will the Judge listen to? Who will win the day? Of course it is our advocate. The Judge responds to Jesus' defence of the accused, not simply because it is his own Son making the defence, but because of the justice of the case. The sins of which we are accused are not denied, but they are already dealt with and paid for. The price has been paid, and the price was the blood of the Lamb. The proof of that is seen in the wounds in the hands, feet and side of our advocate. Case dismissed!

This is a precious truth and we need to bring it forth both in our preaching and in counselling those who are weighed down with guilt. The way to be free of guilt is not Christ and our remorse; not Christ and our determination to do better, but Christ alone as our advocate.

Brothers, we need to preach Christ. Our theology must lead us to the Saviour. People need to hear Christ presented, not merely to hear about Christ and his work, but they need to be introduced to the Saviour and be drawn closer to him. That won't happen unless we ourselves have a close walk with the Lord. Christ alone needs to be vital to us: not our books and Christ; not our learning and Christ: not our theology and Christ: certainly not our salary and Christ, but Christ alone.

Let me finish with a quotation from the prince of preachers;

*Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, preach Christ, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world still needs to be told of its Saviour, and of the way to reach him . . . More and more am I jealous lest any views upon prophecy, church government, politics, or even systematic theology, should withdraw one of us from glorying in the cross of Christ. . . . Blessed is that ministry of which CHRIST IS ALL.*

(Charles Haddon Spurgeon – Lectures to my Students. Zondervan edition p.79)