
Solus Christus

'Christ Alone' For The Twenty-First-Century

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Solas of the Reformation

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Introduction:

When we say the two words, 'Christ alone,' we are asserting two things. First, we are confessing 'Christ' and second, we are confessing Him 'alone.'

These two simple words are not simply a slick marketing slogan for the sixteenth-century Reformation, but are at the core of what it means to be a Christian. After all, the word Christian technically means "follower of Christ."

Unfortunately, there are oppositions to the confession of Christ alone. For example, take the word 'Christ.' There have always been attempts by the forces of darkness to eliminate the name and confession of 'Christ,' as well as the seduction to idolatize the name and confession of Christ. Furthermore, the word 'alone' is also not free of attacks, for prerequisites and codified responses will attempt to replace and undercut the word 'alone,' which essentially negates the single-handed work of Christ.

In our brief time together, the two words of 'Christ' and 'alone' will be examined, with one foot in Reformational theology and another foot within the challenges of the twenty-first-century. In other words, it is intended that you - the hearer - will

understand these two simple words from their rich theological history, while simultaneously considering these two words in today's contemporary culture - a culture that attempts to diminish, change, add to, and eliminate the confession of, 'Christ alone.'

Christ: Attempts to Eliminate

As we begin, let us consider a hypothetical question: What would things look like if Satan took control of Grand Forks?

Immediately our mind drifts to negative things such as: mass chaos, anarchy, bloodshed, moral decay, outbreaks of painful infidelity and so forth.

However, is this how Satan would unleash his rule if he could? Let us reconsider our response a moment and reflect on how the Apostle Paul describes Satan in his second letter to the Church in Corinth. He says that, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." Considering this, it seems that Satan tends to work much more covertly. In reflecting on our hypothetical question again, consider the following answer from a Presbyterian pastor named Donald Barnhouse:

Some 50 years ago He offered up a scenario on his weekly

radio sermon that was broadcast nationwide on CBS. He speculated that if Satan took over a city that, “all of the bars would be closed, pornography would be banished and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing. The children would say, ‘Yes, sir’ and ‘No, ma’am,’ and the churches would be full every Sunday...where Christ is not preached.”¹

My friends, it is easy to miss Christ and measure how things are going based on our happiness and social surroundings. Keep in mind that the Evil One is the great con-artist who entices us to look away from Christ to ourselves saying, “You can save yourself; just try harder! You only have five more steps to go! The potential lies within you! Look at how wonderful things are; you must be blessed with moral integrity.”

Tragically, Satan has Christians and the world fighting the wrong fight of trying to nurture good qualities and starving bad qualities with the purpose of meriting and gaining nonperishable eternal worth. He has everyone chasing a carrot on the end of a stick,

¹ Michal Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 15.

leading us away from Christ-crucified to the jaws of hell.

Simply put, Satan only needs to get the church to look away from Christ. Remember that a lot of things that distract us from Christ are not only negative, but can also be very good things. In the words of Michael Horton, “In order to push us off point, all that Satan needs to do is throw several spiritual fads, moral and political crusades and other ‘relevance’ operations into our field of vision. Focusing the conversation on us - our desires, needs, feelings, experiences, activity, and aspirations - energizes us.”²

So, what would things look like if Satan took over Grand Forks? Simply put, Christ not preached. It would look like Christless Christianity.

The key issue is Christ. Where Christ is clearly professed and presented as the Savior of sinners, we can be most assured that the forces of evil will be on-site trying to turn the eyes of the church away from Christ.

Christ: Attempts to Idolatrize

If a Christless Christianity is not possible - if the confession of ‘Christ’ is not successfully silenced - then Christ will be idolatrized. In other words, if the bold confession of Christ is not

² Ibid, 16.

eliminated in the face of tyranny, death, persecution, and rejection, there is another tactic that we, as Reformation Christians, will be faced with. That tactic is not the removal or silencing of Christ, but the idolatry of Christ.

I am reminded of the Apostle Peter's remarkable confession about Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, the sixteenth chapter. We hear from Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. However, in only a few short verses Jesus goes on to explain exactly what it meant for Him to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In other words, Jesus explained that He, as the Christ, must go to Jerusalem to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Peter though had a hard time accepting Jesus' explanation, especially the suffering and dying part. Thus, Peter rebuked Jesus. Peter was attempting to think about Jesus according to a man-centered way. Peter took Jesus aside and began to reprimand Him saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

What went wrong with Peter is what goes wrong with you, me, and our culture. We subordinate who Jesus is to how we figure things should be with Jesus. Yes, Peter

subordinated the Christ, the Son of the Living God, to his

definition of the Christ . . . Peter worked these words [about Jesus being the Messiah] his way, to what worked for him. Peter would not let Jesus be Christ His way. [Peter] would lay on Jesus the sort of Christ he wanted Him to be.³

My friends, this temptation to redefine Jesus is before each and every one of us; it is prevalent in the North American Church and culture as well. If we were in Peter's shoes we would have recoiled in horror to Jesus' talk of suffering and death. Like Peter we would have said to ourselves, "If Jesus is God's Christ, then let there be an end to the defeatist talk about suffering and death."⁴ Tragically, we Christians and the culture commandeer this great confession and then redefine who Christ is according to our hopes and our dreams and our desires. We do this because it is the way that it is with our idolatrous hearts.

May it be asserted here again that if the confession of Christ cannot be eliminated, the person of Christ is idolatry. That is what happens in a

³ Norman Nagel, *Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel: From Valparaiso to St. Louis* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 261.

⁴ Jeffrey Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2-20:34: Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 839.

world that is hostile to Christ; it is what the sinful flesh does in reaction to Christ and His Gospel.

You see, anytime that we entertain thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him we are breaking the first commandment and committing the sin of idolatry.⁵ In other words, idolatry is rather sneaky because it allows the opportunity to not totally reject the Lord, but an opportunity to simply redefine Him according to our own desires. That is to say, we can add an expansion pack of supposed divine ideologies upon the Lord and not necessarily have to reject the Lord. This allows us to have our cake and eat it too.

This tactic of not rejecting the Lord, but redefining Him according to manmade agendas is the result of the old Adam at work. Keep in mind that the sinful nature - that is our corrupt and evil nature that we have inherited from Adam's fall into sin - does not believe the Gospel, never has believed the Gospel and never will believe the Gospel. The old Adam operates from the context of unbelief. This sinful nature wants independence, not dependence. This sinful nature wants to have everything, including the Lord

⁵ A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*. Full-Proof Ministries, <http://www.full-proof.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Tozer-Knowledge-Of-The-Holy-b.pdf> (Accessed December 29, 2012), 5.

underneath his thumb. This freedom and control can be cleverly attained though, through the means of idolatry. To put it briefly, the old Adam is sly in that he won't flatly reject the Christ and the Gospel for the fear of being exposed. Rather, the old sinful nature will attempt to redefine Christ into his own image.

When we, the North American Church, and the culture hijack and redefine Jesus according to our own definitions and agendas, we become the mouthpiece and tool of Satan. This is surely what Peter did to Jesus by attempting to redefine the mission, work, and person of Christ. This is what you and I do when we take Jesus' words - His Biblical truths about Himself and His mission of the cross - and simply run with them according to our own schemes. Indeed, defining Christ according to our own man-centered opinions, desires, hopes, and dreams, rather than letting Christ simply speak for Himself through His Word is doing the work of Satan.⁶

Please bear with me and my intensity, for this is no light matter. The person and work of Jesus is of utmost importance for you, for me, and for the Christian Church. Who we say Jesus is, is the most important assertion that can be made, for it reveals not only

⁶ Norman Nagel, *Selected Sermons of Norman Nagel: From Valparaiso to St. Louis*, 262.

who we believe Jesus is, but also dictates and defines how we understand the church, how we read the Bible, how we live, and how we understand truth. Our understanding of who Jesus is has lasting ramifications in this life and the next.

So, who do you say Jesus is?

Who is Jesus according to the Scriptures and our Reformation theology?

Who is Jesus according to the North American Church?

Who is Jesus according to our culture?

Keep in mind that Christ alone means that there is only one genuine Christ. However, “today’s American culture offers many “christ” who are not really Christ at all. [Therefore,] asserting solus Christus means that a Reformation Christian rejects positions in opposition to it as false.”⁷

With that said, let us take a moment to examine eleven different false christ’s that are prevalent today in the culture and church; eleven different christ’s that attempt to redefine Jesus Christ (i.e., idolatry Jesus).

⁷ Rod Rosenblatt, (2015-04-28). *Christ Alone* (Kindle Locations 497-501). NRP Books. Kindle Edition.

christ, the Mascot

The first false christ is ‘christ, the Mascot.’ This false christ does not merely stand on the sidelines, but is heard from pulpits across the land cheering for the old sinful nature. Because this Mascot christ encourages people to love themselves first and to gratify all fleshly desires, he only gives suggestions and not commandments. Indeed, instead of confronting the sinful old Adam with the Law unto repentance and death, this Mascot christ cheers on the old Adam to get to the second tier, “Climb higher, work harder, you can do it, onward and upward!” He is all about serving mankind’s will above God’s will. He waters down words to avoid offense, overlooks sin, and never corrects. christ, the Mascot: our first false christ.

christ, the Option-Among-Many

The second false christ is ‘christ, the Option-Among-Many.’ This christ-Among-Many is perfect for smorgasbord faiths, because he is not exclusive. He is not ‘the’ way, ‘the’ truth, and ‘the’ life, but merely ‘a’ way, ‘a’ truth, and ‘a’ life. He sends all to heaven and dismisses hell. He promotes unity and tolerance at all costs. Because he is non-exclusive, this christ-Among-Many is loved by the world and can get along with most any religion of the day. This false jesus is like a spiritual guru, which means that he plays well with Buddhism, New Age

Ideology, Neo-Paganism, and so forth. christ, the Option-Among-Many: our second false christ.

christ, the Example

The third false christ is ‘christ, the Example.’ This false christ is often “preached as a moral example whom we are to emulate. The idea lying behind this view is that our sin is little more than confusion and that we have within us the inner moral wherewithal to do whatever should be done, once we are taught it. The ‘gospel’ of this particular ‘christ’ is pure law, though few pastors who preach ‘christ is your model’ seem to recognize this fact.”⁸ christ, the Example: our third false christ.

christ, the Giver of Bling

The fourth false christ is ‘christ, the Giver of Bling.’ That is to say, this false christ gives health, wealth, and prosperity—bling. This false Americanized Prosperity christ “is the preaching of a ‘christ’ who always grants health or wealth to those whose faith in him reaches the level it should. Those who have watched the Pentecostal televangelists [on Trinity Broadcast Network] recognize this ‘christ.’”⁹ He is all about the ‘best life

⁸ Rod Rosenblatt, (2015-04-28). *Christ Alone* (Kindle Locations 505-507). NRP Books. Kindle Edition.

now’ and earthly treasures; show me the money! christ, the Giver of Bling: our fourth false christ.

christ, Your BFF

The fifth false christ is ‘christ, Your BFF.’ As your ‘best friend forever’ this christ is very personal, so personal, that he lives deep down in the heart. This false christ is separated from the Word—that is to say the Bible—and whispers sentiments in that still small voice from the caverns of the heart. This false christ exalts signs, wonders, and mysticism above God’s Word and is always searching for that tingly and moving experiential feeling. christ, your BFF: our fifth false christ.

christ, Your Girlfriend

The sixth false christ is ‘christ, Your Girlfriend.’ This false christ is meek, mild, soft, and gentle with long feathered hair, and a perfect complexion. He spends his time cuddling little lambs and accentuates emotions. This false christ is the reason for so many praise and worship love songs, touchy-feely sermons, and girly-men pastors. Furthermore, he exalts emotions, experiences, and opinions above sound teaching. A word of caution with this false christ: never worship a christ that you can beat up, for if you can beat up a namby-pamby savior, he is most likely

⁹ Rod Rosenblatt, (2015-04-28). *Christ Alone* (Kindle Locations 509-510). NRP Books. Kindle Edition.

christ, Your Girlfriend—the sixth false christ.

christ, the New Moses

The seventh false christ is ‘christ, the New Moses.’ This false christ imagines that christ is a new lawgiver and has brought us new and improved laws. According to this false christ, Moses’ laws are old and outdated; however, this new-Moses-christ brings new and improved laws. Moses’ laws were 1.0; this new-Moses-christ’s laws are 2.0. No Gospel with this seventh false christ, just more Law.

christ, the Patriot

The eighth false christ is ‘christ the Patriot.’ This false christ is the christ for the GOP Republican Party. He is against raising taxes, a promoter of capitalism, and belongs to the NRA. He functions as an endorser of political strategies, political elections, and political persons. This false christ is the political sanctifier of any campaign wanting the votes of the religious right. christ, the Patriot: our eighth false christ.

christ, the Rabbi

The ninth false christ is ‘christ, the Rabbi.’ This false christ is a good moral teacher, nothing more. Walking on water, healing the sick, and raising people from the dead... these things are creations of myths of old and not characteristic of christ the Rabbi. This false christ is all about that which is

physical; he is a materialized christ who simply was a good teacher, but nothing more. christ, the Rabbi: our ninth false christ.

christ, the Psychotherapist

The tenth false christ is “christ, the Psychotherapist.” This is an extremely popular position in today’s evangelicalism. This ‘christ’ is preached as the one who can heal our inner psychological wounds. He can heal broken marriages, aid us in communicating with our children, and deal with other dysfunctional situations.¹⁰ christ, the Psychotherapist: our tenth false christ.

christ, the Precious Moments Edition

The eleventh and final false christ is ‘christ, the Precious Moments Edition.’ This false christ is a crossless christ with no blood, wounds, or suffering; he is like a Precious Moments christ figurine. In other words, this false christ has been sanitized from the messy blood and scary looking cross. This christ is rated ‘G’ and is all about the resurrection, with no mention of Golgotha. With this christ, the resurrection is emphasized more than the cross; Easter is highlighted more than Good Friday. He is without a

¹⁰ Rod Rosenblatt, (2015-04-28). *Christ Alone* (Kindle Locations 502-504). NRP Books. Kindle Edition.

cross and without nail scarred hands. Our eleventh and final false christ: the Precious Moment christ.

An Excursus: Crossless Christ

A brief excursus is necessary at this time in regard to the eleventh and last false christ.

Many Christians regard Lutherans as being very one-sided or narrow in their theology. The accusation is that we Lutherans shrink the church year together into Good Friday. In other words, Lutherans are often blamed for making every day Good Friday, while ignoring the other major themes of the church year. We are accused of failing to move beyond the cross to the resurrection.

A recent comment from a reader on my personal blog 'PM Notes' captures the concern well. She stated,

All too often you Lutherans focus exclusively on Christ's death and not near enough (if any) on his resurrection. The power of the gospel is that Christ ROSE from the dead; it's our future hope to rise as well!

Hermann Sasse in his book *We Confess* also addresses these criticisms towards Lutherans. He states that we are accused of only focusing on the cross, only one fact among others in the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed.

What a constriction of Christian truth Luther has been guilty of! How can true Christian theology be limited to a theology of the cross, as if there were not also a theology of the resurrection...?¹¹

So, what shall be our response? Is the choice between the cross and the resurrection? Are we only faced with two options, the cross and the rest of the Bible's doctrines? If so, should we fight for the cross at the expense of diminishing other Biblical themes? Should we simply loosen up our passion for Luther's theology of the cross? Thankfully the choice is not between the cross and other Biblical themes, for this would be an example of an either-or logical fallacy. The choice is not between two alternative doctrines as the only possibilities.

Sasse responds to these apprehensions saying,

Obviously the 'theology of the cross' does not mean that for a theologian the church year shrinks together into nothing but Good Friday. Rather, it means that Christmas, Easter and Pentecost cannot be understood without Good Friday.¹²

¹¹ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess: Anthology*, tr. Norman Nagel (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 38.

Sasse goes on to state,

Always it is from the cross that everything is understood, because hidden in the cross is the deepest essence of God's revelation.¹³

What this means is that we don't avoid the themes of creation, the work of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection, and so forth. Rather, when we speak of these themes we do so while seeing the cross in the background and we do so within the shadow of the cross. Otherwise stated, we embrace these Biblical themes, preach them, and teach them while we understand them in light of the cross, but never apart from the cross.

This is the end of the excursus.

Idolatry of Christ and the Diminishing of Original Sin

In the previous eleven examples of false christs, it is apparent that there is much idolatry. Indeed, when the person, work, and nature of Christ are obscured, idolatry is present. With that said though, there are several common themes working within the different false christ examples. In other words, there is something identifiable and definable. What is identifiable and definable is each

example's inherent diminishing of mankind's original sin. To rephrase this, when we fail to clearly see or when we underestimate the depravity of mankind, the person of Christ suffers. Indeed, not only does the old Adam want to put Christ into his debt, but the kind of savior that is needed for mankind is dependent on the predicament that mankind is in. For example, if mankind is viewed as basically good with some bad habits then a Christ who is crucified for sinners is not needed, but rather, a-patriotic-mascot-BFF-jesus who gives bling and acts like a girlfriend could be handy to enhance the Christian life.

Conversely though, when we assess mankind in light of the Scriptures we will come to see that mankind's nature is always much darker than we usually believe it to be. True, mankind is created in the image of God; however, the fall of mankind in Genesis 3 marred the image making man not "mostly dead" in sin but "dead-dead" in sin. A mere mascot, example, bling giver, BFF, girlfriend, new Moses, patriot, rabbi, psychotherapist, and Precious Moments jesus are not sufficient with this view of sinful mankind. Rather an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-sufficient bleeding-dying-rising-Savior is needed to deliver mankind from sin, death, and the devil.

¹² Ibid, 396.

¹³ Ibid.

Why This Is Important

As previously stated, this subject is of utmost importance. The reason why? “Hell is just as happy with those who believe in a fake Jesus as with those who believe in no Jesus at all. There is no difference.”¹⁴ A fake Jesus standing far off in the distance cheering you and me on like a mascot while we attempt to enact our own supposed spiritual powers towards manmade endeavors, is no real Jesus at all, but a crossless and bloodless Jesus. An Americanized Jesus who promises you and me health, wealth, and happiness if only we do ‘this’ or ‘that,’ is no real Jesus at all, but a crossless and bloodless Jesus. There is only one Christ and one Jesus: the Jesus who would undergo great suffering, rejection, and be killed and rise again after three days. Yes, there is only one Jesus, but there is a world full of imitations, imitations created in the image of what we want Jesus to be for us.

Christ: The Reformation’s Confession

Now that we have defined and exposed all the false Christs in our culture and North American Churches, it is of paramount importance that we take a moment to define who Christ actually is. As we define who Christ is

and what He did, we must do so while acknowledging that Jesus does not act according to our own sinful definitions of who we think He is, or who we think He ought to be. He is Lord and we are not. Our opinions, hopes, and dreams of who we think Christ should be, do not matter. He is not handcuffed to our religious undertakings and aspirations. Like the Lion Aslan in C.S. Lewis’ books, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the Lord is not tame or safe, but He is good. Indeed, He does not like being tied down by our definitions, ambitions, and desires; He must not be pressed for He is not a tame cat, but a kingly Lion.

Looking back to the Gospel of Matthew, the sixteenth chapter, we see that Jesus did not yield to Peter’s objections, but cast Peter’s objections and the temptations of Satan behind Himself, and walked directly into the suffering, pain, death, and sin of Mount Calvary; and He considered it well worthwhile. Therefore, on the basis of Scripture, we confess that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary. He is our Lord, who has redeemed us, lost and condemned persons. He purchased and won us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. He purchased and won us that we may be

¹⁴ Chad L. Bird, *Christ Alone: Meditations and Sermons* (Copyright 2014 Chad L. Bird), 102.

His own and that we may live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.¹⁵

This is Jesus, the historic and living Christ. When we confess Christ, we confess a Christ that died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.¹⁶ Yes, we confess Christ and Him crucified and resurrected for sinners like me and like you.

Take comfort dear Baptized Saints, it was necessary for the Christ to die. This was the plan and Jesus carried out the plan with complete and total faithfulness. It was necessary that He suffer, die, and be raised—for you and me; for our idolatry, for our past sins, for our present sins, and for our future sins. It was necessary for Him to suffer, die, and be raised for our forgiveness, so that He might clothe you and me in righteousness, and declare us His own for all of eternity.

Christ.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism*, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), Explanation of The Second Article of the Apostle's Creed.

¹⁶ See 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

Christ: Negating the 'Alone'

Now that we have laid forth what we mean and do not mean by the word 'Christ' it is crucial that the word 'alone' be examined as well.

Period, Not a Comma

The word 'alone' is a controversial word in our day and age. The word 'alone' indicates that something is confined to a specified subject or thing or person. It is a word that is used to emphasize that only one factor out of several is being considered. It is a word that emphasizes that one thing is greater or better or more unique than other things around it. In other words, the word 'alone' puts a period after the word 'Christ' not a comma. It creates exclusivity. Otherwise stated, the great scandal of the Reformation was not only the exposure of the false christ who demanded indulgences and works righteousness for salvation, but the exclusive particle 'alone' caused offense as well. The word 'alone' has always caused offense from the Apostle Paul, to the Lutheran Reformation, and to today in the twenty-first-century.¹⁷

With that stated, as Christians I believe it is possible to arrive at a solid and Biblical confession of who Christ

¹⁷ To learn more about this subject, please refer to the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article IV:61-74 where Melancthon speaks about the exclusionary Word of God.*

is. However, once Christ is confessed, there will be a great divide among Christians on whether or not a period or a comma will be inserted. In other words, the idea of Christ with a period is offensive to our modern sensibilities, because it undercuts our role and our narcissistic inclinations. On the other hand, a comma after Christ allows for us to be involved in our spirituality, even if it is 1% involvement. The reality is that we desire to adhere to comma theology because our sinful nature is so inclined to add to Jesus. Our flesh - that is our old Adam - cannot stand the idea of Jesus with a period. We want to add a comma so that we can allow for our will and abilities to have a subtle, yet prominent role in our spirituality.

Tragically though, it has been rightly said before that “Jesus + something = nothing” and that “Jesus + nothing = everything.” That is to say, it is that comma or that small addition to Christ - the negating of the word ‘alone’ - that causes the most problems.

Think about this for a minute how we subtly negate the word ‘alone’ and add to Jesus:

Jesus + our Christian living

Jesus + our decision

Jesus + our obedience

Jesus + our repentance

Jesus + our response/devotion

Jesus + our prayers

Jesus + our good works as evidence of salvation

What are the implications of having a comma after Jesus, even if it constitutes only 1%? The harsh reality is that anytime that we add to Jesus, we end up subtracting from His work on the cross. A spirituality of .001% works righteousness is still works righteousness and may open the door to Christian apostasy.

Comma Theology

More specifically, let us take a closer look at two types of comma theology that are prevalent in our day and age. These are two types of theologies that negate the period; two theologies that disregard the ‘alone-ness’ of Christ and attempt to add to Christ.

Pre-gospel Legalism

The first is what I like to call, ‘Pre-gospel Legalism.’ Pre-gospel Legalism occurs when: one imposes requirements, hoops, or duties as prerequisites that need to be earned, obtained, or acquired, so that one may receive Christ’s forgiveness and acceptance. Prerequisites such as:

- A person needs to reach a certain standard of moral perfection and rid himself of certain moral vices in order to obtain forgiveness of sins.

- A person needs to do good Christian deeds in order to exchange these deeds for forgiveness.
- A person needs to improve his socio-economic standing in order to be worthy of receiving grace.
- A person needs to give a certain monetary amount to prove worthiness and devotion, in order to be admitted to the Kingdom of God.
- Etc....

Pre-gospel Legalism occurs for the purpose of mankind acquiring salvation, which leads to a man-centered theology. Pre-gospel Legalism removes the period from Christ and then demands human requirements for acquiring salvation, which results not in a Christ with a period, but a christ with a comma. In Pre-gospel Legalism, mankind's legalistic agenda exists before; the pre-conditions are prerequisites for the reception of Christ and His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Post-gospel Legalism

The second type of comma theology is what I like to call Post-gospel Legalism. Post-gospel Legalism happens when: one codifies the response to the Gospel by prescribing what the response to the Gospel should mean, when it should happen, how it should happen, how it should be

done, how often it should happen, and where it should happen, so as to legitimize God's forgiveness and acceptance in Christ. Codified responses such as:

- A person needs to pray 5 times per day at specific times with a specific formula to validate that he is really a committed believer.
- A person needs to do family devotions in a specified manner from a specific book to be a true family man of God.
- A person needs to evangelize to 3 people per day in a certain evangelism technique in order to show that they are an 'on fire' disciple of Christ.
- Etc....

Post-gospel legalism occurs for the purpose of mankind legitimizing salvation, which leads to a man-centered theology. Post-gospel legalism removes the period from Christ and then attaches human conditions for legitimizing salvation, which results not in a Christ with a period, but a christ with a comma. In Post-gospel Legalism, mankind's legalistic agenda exists after; the requirements are conditions for the maintaining of Christ and His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Dangers of Comma Theology

What makes both Pre-gospel legalism and Post-gospel Legalism so tragic

and toxic is that they both bury Christ. They attempt to shove Christ back into the tomb, for they do not use Christ as a mediator for sinners. These comma ideologies imagine that by their own fulfillment of prerequisites and conditions of the Law that forgiveness of sins is received and maintained. This poisonous comma theology is an invention of the old Adam and is enacted by idle people who have no idea how the forgiveness of sins takes place. This comma ideology does not realize that by adding to Christ, one is actually negating Christ's atonement.¹⁸

Simply stated, when we use a comma after Christ, Christ is only going to be as good as our addition is. In other words, how will we ever know if our Christian living, decision, religious endeavoring, obedience, repentance, prayers, devotions, and good works are good enough? We will always be vulnerable to doubt and will always lack assurance when we use a comma rather than a period.

Have we been obedient enough?

Have we made a good enough salvation decision and is it binding?

Have we prayed enough and done enough good works?

¹⁸ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession, IV18-20.*

Have we sincerely repented and actually truly meant it?

Anytime mankind takes credit for acquiring or legitimizing salvation, the emphasis is taken off of Christ's atonement and placed on mankind, the accent mark is moved off of Christ. It is Christ and solely Christ that acquires and legitimizes salvation for you and for me, anything less waters down or confuses the message of the Gospel and strips away assurance.

The Good News of Period Theology

The good news is that this Christian life is a 'period' kind of spirituality! The Reformers of the sixteenth-century knew this and fought for this against the synergistic and Pelagian spiritual climate of the day (i.e., they fought against man-centered theology). That is the reason why we received the blessed "Solas" from them: the Word Alone; Christ Alone; Faith Alone; Grace Alone!

Baptized, Saints, hear this today, nowhere in Scripture is Jesus spoken of as a starting point, the beginning, but now you must add to Him or move beyond Him. Salvation in Jesus does not have a comma, which means that we cannot attach anything to Him. He is not a launching pad for greater and better euphoric mystic experiences. Christ is not a baseball base that needs to be rounded before you get to home plate. Jesus is not incomplete

and He is not a means to another end. Jesus is not a means to the end goal of hope, joy, and glory. No! He is the end. Jesus is your hope. He is your joy. He is glory. He is the alpha 'and' the omega. You do not move beyond Jesus. Jesus is the beginning and the end.

No comma.

No dash.

No colon.

Jesus, with a period!

Indeed, you and I are saved by Christ completely, we are sustained by Christ, and we grow into Christ. No comma is needed.

In fact as we progress in this Christian faith,

we move away from pride in ourselves and our own achievements to a gradual awareness of our spiritual failure and Christ's work in us as we entrust ourselves to Him. We move away from the conviction that we are self-sufficient to the repeated experience of spiritual bankruptcy. We move on from delusions of our spiritual importance to a growing sense of our utter insignificance and the glory of God. We move on from delight in our own power to the painful recognition of our spiritual weakness. We are

brought from our self-righteousness to the increasing consciousness that we are sinful.¹⁹

John Kleinig goes on to speak about this saying,

In our human lives, growing up involves the gradual shift from dependence to independence. But the reverse is true for us as we grow spiritually. On our journey we become more and more dependent on Christ for everything in every situation. We do not then proceed from childhood to adulthood; we move forward into spiritual childhood as we grow in faith and become people of prayer... As we mature in faith we learn to borrow all that we need and all that we are from Christ. Only as beggars do we have access to the Father's presence and His grace. Only as we receive grace upon grace from His fullness can we praise Him in the heavenly choir.²⁰

It is Christ with a period, not a comma.

¹⁹ John Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 34-35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Christ: It Centers on Him

Our confession is 'Christ' and Christ 'alone.' Here we stand; we can confess nothing else. Christ and Him alone is the center of our theology. Certainly, we Christians are Christocentric.

Now, regarding this great Christocentric confession though, there is one more loose end that needs to be addressed and that is this, who is running the verbs in Christianity? In other words, it is quite possible to have the correct confession of Christ and to confess Him alone and to have Him at the center of theology, but to do so in such a way that Christ becomes a recipient of our verbs, rather than you and I being the recipients of Christ doing the verbs to and for us. Permit me to explain a bit more.

Christ Runs The Verbs

As Norman Nagel loves to say, it is all in who is running the verbs. If the 'Christian' runs the verbs in Christianity: it is a dead end. Only if 'Christ' runs the verbs does it lead somewhere. Otherwise stated, in our modern Western Civilization we are a culture that likes to do things. We are neither comfortable nor familiar with being acted upon. Even computer word processing programs, such as Microsoft Word, flags verbs when they are in the passive voice, as improper grammar. That stated, it is urgent that

we guard against the temptation to take control of the verbs, which would result in the sheep serving the Shepherd, the clay forming the Potter, the branch producing fruit for the Vine, and the sinner saving the Savior. This inversion – as subtle as it is – results in undercutting everything about Solus Christus. To have Christ and Him alone as the center of theology is indeed necessary, but it must be understood in a way that Christ is the one running the verbs. He is the subject, we are the direct objects; He did and does the divine verbs to and for us. Christ is 'for' you and 'for' me.

What Verbs Are Being Done?

Finally, to uphold Christ alone as the center of our theology, it must be asked, "What verbs does Christ do?" If any of the false christs are to sneak back into our theology at this point, the verbs would sound like this: cheering, modeling, friending, psychologizing, and so forth. No, may this never be. Christ-crucified alone for sinners is a Christ that suffers, bleeds, dies, and resurrects – for you and for me. The Lord runs the verbs," that way they are reliable. To have us run them, they begin to wobble. All verbs of salvation are in the passive, the divine passive."²¹

²¹ Norman Nagel, *Lecture Notes from Systems II Class* (Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO).

The Lord justifies you; the Lord redeems you; the Lord sanctifies you; the Lord forgives you; the Lord illuminates you; the Lord regenerates you; the Lord converts you; the Lord claims you; the Lord adopts you; the Lord baptizes you...

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have heard about Christ; we have heard about Christ alone; we have heard about Christ running the verbs. This is Christ-crucified alone – for you and for me.

This solid understanding of Christ's person and work on our behalf is the central message of the Scriptures and at the heart of the Reformation and at the heart of our theology today. However, the attacks on Solus Christus will continue as they have in the past. Yes, the person and work of Christ will continue to be attacked and the alone-ness of Christ will be attacked as well. In spite of this, the Lutheran Church of the Reformation confesses Christ-crucified. From the pulpit, the podium, the bedside, and the desk, Christ's holy bride, the church, and her pastors preach Christ-crucified. When people come looking for marital advice? It is Christ-crucified! When people come looking for sympathy and a listening ear? It is Christ-crucified! When a new baby is born, when jobs are lost, when fear of retirement sets in, when parents die,

and when the shadow of death encroaches? It is Christ-crucified.

It is all about Jesus dying and rising. No matter the circumstances, what the situation, it is Christ-crucified alone for me and for you and for the world.

+Solus Christus, Amen.

Notes:

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