

Solus Christus

The Reformation / 500 Years

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
- 1 Timothy 2:5

The Reformation of 1517 ignited a flame on the European continent, soon to envelope the world. Its primary objective was to point people back to the truth of God's Word and put an end to the ever-increasing power and doctrinal fallacies of the Roman Catholic Church. During this time, God raised up men to stand up for the truth of Scripture and to unify around 5 points of contention against the Roman Catholic Church. We know these to be the Five Sola (Faith Alone, Scripture Alone, Christ Alone, Grace Alone, for the Glory of God Alone).

This evening, I will be speaking on the point of contention with the Roman Catholic Church that caused these early reformers to hold to the doctrine of *Christ Alone*.

I want you to place yourself with me in the early sixteenth century.

1501 - First black slaves in America brought to Spanish colony of Santo Domingo.

1503 - Leonardo da Vinci paints the Mona Lisa.

1506 - St. Peter's Church started in Rome; its completion in 1626.

1509 - Henry VIII ascends English throne. Michelangelo paints the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

1513 - Balboa becomes the first European to encounter the Pacific Ocean.¹

During this era in European history, the church meant everything. The Roman Catholic Church had grown to such power that it influenced commerce, politics, military and even international relations with foreign powers. To be outside of the church would have severely restricted individuals from business transactions, social life, and much more. If you did not comply with the church's authority, you were cast out or excommunicated. Because of this, there was a heightened fear of the church that radically encouraged compliance to tradition rather than true spiritual growth. As you can imagine, there were a few who questioned the church's power and began to search Scriptures for truth. This is what brings us to the reformation.

Now again, this evening I will be talking about the doctrine of *Christ Alone*. Although it bears a large part to play with salvation, the abolition of "good works", the abolition of indulgences, and the fallacy of purgatory – these topics really lie under the teachings of *Faith Alone* and *Grace Alone*. The doctrine of *Christ Alone* became such an important part of the reformation because it countered the Roman Catholic belief in mediation.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
- 1 Timothy 2:5

Why would a passage like this cause so much controversy to a believer in the early 1500s? In essence, the Roman Catholic Church had established itself as the true mediation between God and man. Tradition speaks of the Pope as being of direct descent from the Apostle Peter who is the "rock" on which Christ builds His church.² Therefore the Pope carries the "keys to the kingdom" and through the hierarchical order of Pope, Archbishops, Bishops and priests, the church has the power and authority to mediate between God and man.³

¹ Infoplease.com (1500-1599 World History). <https://www.infoplease.com/history-and-government/1000-1899-ad-world-history/1500-1599-ad-world-history>

² New ESV Study Bible (*ESV Text Edition:2011*), Crossway. (Matthew 16:18-19) "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed[d] in heaven."

³ Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., 1958) p. 907 "But the whole religion of Popery tends to lead men to contrive for themselves innumerable methods of seeking salvation; and hence we infer, that it is full to overflowing with abominable sacrileges. More especially, this word of Christ condemns the abomination of the Mass. All the sacrifices of the Law must have ceased, for the salvation of men has been completed by the one sacrifice of the death of Christ. What right, then, have the Papist, or what plausible excuse can they assign for saying, that they are authorized to prepare a new

And this is the error. What the Roman Catholic Church has done is they have interpreted Matthew 16:18-19 as Christ giving over His mediatorial work to Peter and to the church. Basically, Christ has ascended and left the church to continue the mediatorial work for God's people completely overlooking the fact that Christ Himself is the forever Mediator of His people.

Well... How can we argue this? I think first we must look at the life Christ and listen carefully to His words. The Old Testament is filled with prophets, priests, and kings who were mediators for God's people. Their job was to call people to repentance and point them to the God Who saves. In this, they were small representatives of Christ, giving us an imperfect picture of what the perfect Savior would do. If this is true, then Jesus was the culmination of all of these. He is the perfect prophet, the perfect priest, and the perfect King. He did not come as the perfect Mediator to then pass it on again to imperfect mediators – say Peter. NO. He finished the task and is now mediating for His children, sitting at the right hand of God.⁴

Christ Himself said “It is finished!”⁵ when He died on the cross. His work had been complete in every way. Sinners have been redeemed and set free and the ransom had been paid. He is now the perfect Mediator for us.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- Hebrews 4:14-16

If Christ claims to be the perfect mediator between God and man, then why has the church interfered with such an amazing truth? Many believers started to doubt the church's sacraments (in particular the sacrament of **penance** where one would have to go to the local priest to confess sins at a confession box in order to receive forgiveness). Questions also began to transpire regarding the work of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, the church claimed that any lay person did not have the authority to read and interpret Scripture, but this right was reserved for the magistrates of the church. They believed that if every individual began reading the Scriptures and interpreting God's Word for themselves that mass error would ensue – how ironic that even in keeping the sacred Scriptures for themselves error was inevitable. This is why the church practiced **Mass** in Latin. This was because the Scriptures themselves were not translated into the common tongue in order to keep people from reading and interpreting on their own. Instead, the people necessarily needed the clergy or priest to translate for them and communicate its meaning.

This control of the Scriptures allowed the church to maintain dominance and power as the sole source of mediation between God and man. If Christ was the ultimate Mediator Who sent His Spirit into the regenerate, then they would have the capacity to read and understand in themselves.⁶ Although there is some truth to the Roman Catholic fear that some may misinterpret the sacred Scriptures, it is clearly evident that God worked greater wonders through its accessibility to the common people.

sacrifice, to reconcile God to men? They reply that it is not a new sacrifice, but the very sacrifice which Christ offered. But this is easily refuted; for, in the first place, they have no command to offer it; and, secondly, Christ, having once accomplished, by a single oblation, all that necessary to be done, declares, from the cross, that all is finished. They are worse than forgers, therefore, for they wickedly corrupt and falsify the testament sealed by the precious blood of the Son of God.”

⁴ New ESV Study Bible (*ESV Text Edition:2011*), Crossway. (Romans 8:33-34) “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

⁵ New ESV Study Bible (*ESV Text Edition:2011*), Crossway. (John 19:30) “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

⁶ New ESV Study Bible (*ESV Text Edition:2011*), Crossway. (2 Peter 1:3) “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,”

Herein, the early reformers contested the church that their Mediator was not the church, but Christ Himself. Jesus is the One we run to for salvation. Jesus is the One we run to for forgiveness of sins, and by His blood we have an advocate Who mediates for us at the right hand of God.

In many ways, it seems like the Roman Catholic Church was attempting to mend the curtain that had been torn in two at Christ's death.⁷ Although Jesus had made a way for His children to enter the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, the Catholic Church was restricting the access to His throne. The Levitical Priesthood had been done away with in Christ at the cross. Why then re-erect a system of mediation? The answer is that it brought power and control to the church. In this, we cry with all of God's children "In Christ Alone".

⁷ New ESV Study Bible (*ESV Text Edition:2011*), Crossway. (Matthew 27:50-51) "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split."