

## Sola Christus—Is There Room for Doctrine?

### Salvation in Christ Alone

As a way of introduction to our message today, let me affirm from the outset that one of the great axioms of the Protestant Reformation is “Sola Christus”—Christ alone. This truth, that salvation is found in none other than Jesus Christ and Him alone, is unquestionably laid forth in Scripture:

In **Acts 4:11-12**, we read the Apostle Peter declare to the religious leaders of his day that Jesus Christ, “is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Today our objective is not to establish that Christ is our only hope of salvation. I’m taking it as a given that everyone here and those listening elsewhere are fully convinced of that most basic Bible truth. What we want to explore today is the question of whether Solus Christus—salvation in Christ alone—allows room for doctrine. In other words, is doctrine a separate concern than that of having a relationship with Jesus Christ? **PRAYER**

### “Project Emilie”

When I was a young man in college, I noticed a particular young woman named Emilie. She had beautiful hair and an incredible, sweet smile. We shared a few classes together and whenever possible I tried to position myself nearby or at least in her line of sight. After a long while—and a lot more story than I’m going to share with you today—the time came when I wanted to pursue a serious relationship with her. However, though I’m confident she enjoyed our rapport and mutual interest, Emilie was worried because one significant weakness of mine was remembering important details of her life and demonstrating her importance to me. Knowing my own proclivity to miss important milestones and to downplay or entirely overlook things that were special to her, I realized I had to make a real change and thus I came up with “Project Emilie.” Project Emilie was a really just a folder on my computer desktop where I kept a running list of all the things I learned about Emilie and ideas I had for demonstrating my appreciation for her. I made sure to write down her birthday, her eye color, her favorite foods, and other such details that without conscientious attention on my part could go by unnoticed but may end up costing me the chance to be with her!

To make a long story short, Emilie is now my wife and we have three lovely children, so—though the path was far more circuitous than necessary—I regard Project Emilie as a mission accomplished! Looking back, it could be easy to blur the details of our story and say we had love at first sight. But that’s not what happened. There was attraction at first sight, there was interest at first sight, there was excitement at first sight, there were butterflies at first sight, but there was not love. It was only by studying her, learning more about her, spending time with her and conscientiously demonstrating my appreciation for her that I came to sincerely love her. I did not—and I would dare say I could not—truly love her without truly knowing her.

Though clearly in an entirely different sphere, a relationship of true love with Jesus grows in much the same way as any human relationship: initial interest that leads to further inquiry. And that’s exactly how the Lord intends our relationship with Him to develop... to learn and keep learning. It is God’s will for us to relate to Him not based on mere subjective experience but upon the unmovable bedrock of truth.

### Genuinely Spiritual VS. Merely Sensual

I’ve always found it interesting that there is an entire commandment devoted to the prohibition of graven images. God is invisible and apparently He intends us to love Him on principle, but faith, if you will, and not by sight. It would diminish our conception of God to represent Him by physical objects.

Later in Exodus when Moses asked to see God’s glory; God described His character. Still later, when Jesus came to this earth, though He could be seen physically, He still intended men to be drawn to His character: His works of beneficence and His words of truth. (Isaiah 53:2)

Later, on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, Christ once again veiled Himself as He patiently explained Bible prophecy to His despondent disciples. Only afterward did He reveal His identity, but notice that what stirred them most was not even the realization that He was with them in person!

**Luke 24:31, 32** *Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"*

Doctrine, the truth about God as written in His Word, reveals to us the heart of God more than any sensual representation ever could. No piece of music no matter how moving, no work of art no matter how intricate or elaborate, no architectural edifice no matter how ornate or awe-inspiring can move a soul to genuine love for God like knowing Him through an understanding of His Word.

In **2 Timothy 3:14-15**, the Apostle Paul counsels his young ministerial apprentice, "you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

I don't know if you noticed, but in that one sentence Paul touches on three of the great Reformation pillars! "that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures (Sola Biblia), which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith (Sola Fide) which is in Christ Jesus (Sola Christus)." And more importantly, at least for our purposes today, notice carefully Paul's explanation that for "salvation through faith... in Christ Jesus" he "must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of"; that the "Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise for salvation." For Paul, there is absolutely no separation between salvation in Jesus and doctrine about Jesus.

Only in the study of the Bible doctrine do you discover who Jesus really is! Jesus is our creator, He is our redeemer, He is our intercessor and advocate, He is our judge and soon-coming king. He does not burn people in the fires of hell for all eternity, but apportions punishment "each one according to his works." He is kind, gentle, and patient yet "those whom He loves he rebukes and disciplines," He is self-sacrificing... He is love!

Many today casually or even callously dismiss doctrine as just so much unnecessary accouterment when in reality, doctrinal truth is the very substance of Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul could assert in **Colossians 2:3** that in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This is why Jesus Himself declared in **John 8:31, 32** "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

### We Come to Christ Through The Word

We see the centrality of doctrine when it comes to baptism, as well. In Christianity, baptism is a sacred ceremony enjoined and exemplified by Christ Himself. This act that is a public affirmation of your decision to follow Jesus Christ symbolically joins you to His death on your behalf and begins your new life in His strength. **(Romans 6:1-11)**

And how exactly does one come to the point of desiring such a radical, lifelong commitment to Christ? Well, let's let Paul answer that question. Immediately following that beautiful Souls Christus statement found in **Romans 10:13** For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," Paul continues in the very next verse to explain how someone comes to that saving faith in Jesus. "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" His answer is found in **verse 17** where he declares that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Clearly the conviction that leads to conversion comes from the Word of God.

That is exactly what Jesus Himself taught. In Christ's final instructions to His disciples found in **Matthew 28:19, 20** that we commonly refer to today as the "Great Commission," Jesus declared: "Go therefore and make

disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”

We see this connection between being convicted by the Word of God and then demonstrating conversation through baptism in the history of the early church recorded in the book of Acts.

**Acts 2:41** Then those who gladly received his word were baptized and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

**Acts 8:30, 31** So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

**Acts 8:35-38** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

#### We Stay In Christ Through the Word

There’s a lot of talk in the Seventh-day Adventist Church these days about troubling retention rates of youth and newly-baptized members. Much is said about the need for personal friendships in the church, and active participation in the mission of the church... and there’s certainly great truth to those recommendations. But one concern I have is whether people are genuinely grounded in the Word of God before their baptism and whether they are continuing to meditate on God’s Word after their baptism. Bible study is not only what draws you to Christ but it is also what keeps you in Christ!

**Acts 2:42** And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Notice that after they had “gladly received” the present truth Gospel of Christ working at the right hand of God in the heavenly sanctuary and after they were baptized and joined the church... the kept studying!

**Acts 17:11, 12** *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed...*

- In the context, that fact that “many of them believed” was a direct result of not only hearing the Word but “search[ing] the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.”
- One thing I have noticed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: we strongly oppose the notion of being “once saved always saved” (and rightly so), yet at the same time we too often practice “once learned, always learned!” People will say things like “I came in to the message in 1982” and because they haven’t left yet we’re supposed to say “Amen!” We should aim far higher than mere member retention... we all need continual spiritual growth. And how do we continue to grow in Christ?
- **1 Peter 2:2,3** “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

Friends, a superficial reading and mere passive acceptance of truths half-learned in the distant past is one of the main reasons the personal spiritual experience and public witness of many among us is often so poor.

Once when preaching a wedding homily, I wanted to encourage the couple to live a life of ministry like Aquila and Priscilla. Instead, however, I accidentally encouraged them to live a life of ministry like Ananias and Sapphira. The saddest part? No one raised an eyebrow—and some people even said “Amen!”

Elder C.D. Brooks, that mighty man of God who has now passed to his rest once saliently commented how “Young and old need the discipline of the Word of God. When people feel like they can do what they please, then the church loses its premium value... But “feel-goodism” is pervading our congregations, creeping in, and our churches and our schools are floundering... We fail our people when we water down and compromise and undermine and repudiate the message that God has given us to bear and to live.”

#### The Word: Our Protection from Deception

There’s a reason Christ makes truth so important... because there’s an enemy. Satan’s only really effective weapon is deception.

#### **John 8:44; Revelation 12:7-9; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15**

- **Matthew 24:3-5** *Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” 4 And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.*
- **Matthew 24:22-25** *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.*

Fortunately for us, Jesus Christ has faced the wiles of the devil and has demonstrated how victory is attained against the arch deceiver. His defense... His *only* defense? The Word of God. **Matthew 4:1-11**

Looking down the centuries in prophecy, Paul warned not only of a “falling away” within the church that would give rise to the antichrist power of the Roman Papacy, he also outlined the manner of his war against God’s people. Surprise, surprise... it is rooted in deception.

**2 Thessalonians 2:9-10** *The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

Please note that it is not because people do not know the truth that they are deceived, but that they do not love the truth. To Timothy, his young apprentice in ministry, Paul reiterated this warning.

**2 Timothy 4:1-5** *I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

Notice carefully that the prophecy does not caution Timothy that those who do not “endure sound doctrine” will leave the church—they’ll just leave your church! There are plenty of people who call themselves Christians but do not want to have anything to do with sound doctrine!

**Great Controversy, p. 523** *Those who are unwilling to accept the plain, cutting truths of the Bible are continually seeking for pleasing fables that will quiet the conscience. The less spiritual, self-denying, and humiliating the doctrines presented, the greater the favor with which they are received. These persons degrade the intellectual powers to serve their carnal desires. Too wise in their own conceit to search the Scriptures with contrition of soul and earnest prayer for divine guidance, they have no shield from delusion. Satan is ready to supply the heart’s desire, and he palms off his deceptions in the place of truth.*

**Great Controversy, p. 593** *Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions... The last great delusion is soon to open before us.*

*Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures... In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.*

#### The Most Insidious Form of Deception: Self-Deception

It is often asserted that “you’re only responsible for what you know.” This leads some to embrace a “less is more” or “ignorance is bliss” ideology... that since I’m only responsible for what I know, then I’ll make sure to know as little as possible. The truth is that in the sight of God, you’re responsible both for what you know and for what you *could* know.

In the midnight interview with Nicodemus, Jesus rebuked his feigned ignorance of the new birth experience. He explained that the problem wasn’t that the truth was too hard to understand, but that it was too unpleasant to apply.

**John 3:19, 20** And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

The same can be said of the Sanhedrin rulers who heard the heart-cutting present-truth message of Stephen.  
**Acts 7:54-57**

***Last Day Events, p. 218** Those who have an opportunity to hear the truth and yet take no pains to hear or understand it, thinking that if they do not hear they will not be accountable, will be judged guilty before God the same as if they had heard and rejected. There will be no excuse for those who choose to go in error when they might understand what is truth. In His sufferings and death Jesus has made atonement for all sins of ignorance, but there is no provision made for willful blindness.*

The Apostle James picks up on this theme of deception when he urges us in **James 1:21, 22** Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Disease is bad enough when it is contracted through unintentional contact with some dreaded pathogen or through some hereditary predisposition. But those types of diseases are not the ones harming most people in our modern society. Nearly every one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. are diseases or activities that are mostly, if not entirely, self-inflicted. Personal lifestyle choice regarding diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc. are the leading determinants of most of the diseases so many dread. This is exactly the same in the spiritual realm... like most physical disease, most spiritual deception is self-inflicted. Anytime we step off the firm foundation of sound biblical doctrine we leave ourselves vulnerable to deception.

**1 Timothy 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons

In the final analysis, everyone follows doctrine... the only question is will it be the doctrine of Jesus Christ or the doctrine of the antichrist?

#### Conclusion and Appeal

In contemporary Christianity it is becoming more and more acceptable to separate Jesus from doctrine, to distinguish a relationship with Christ from Biblical truth. But in this case, what is fashionable may well prove fatal to your Christian experience. Interestingly enough, it was none other than Jesus Himself who explained that to truly abide in Him, Sola Christus, you must abide in His Word. **John 15:5-8.**

- In the doctrine of the Great Controversy we see Christ's wisdom, patience, and self-sacrifice.
- In the doctrine of the Sabbath we see Christ's desire for communion with us and His expectation of loving devotion in return.
- In the doctrine of Christian stewardship, we acknowledge Christ's ownership of the world and His magnanimity in requiring so little of us in tithe and offerings.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:9**, the Apostle Paul states, "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

None other than Jesus Himself affirms this fact in the simplest and most succinct way possible. **John 17:3** records Christ's emphatic declaration to His heavenly Father: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

#### Real Love Requires Knowledge

Though clearly in an entirely different sphere, a relationship of true love with Jesus grows in much the same way as any human relationship: initial interest that leads to further inquiry.

- Only in the study of the Bible do you discover who Jesus really is! Jesus is our creator, He is our redeemer, He is our intercessor and advocate, He is our judge and soon-coming king. He does not burn people in the fires of hell for all eternity, but apportions punishment "each one according to his works." He is kind, gentle, and patient yet "those whom He loves he rebukes and disciplines," He is self-sacrificing... He is love!
- In the doctrine of the Great Controversy we see Christ's wisdom, patience, and self-sacrifice.
- In the doctrine of the Sabbath we see Christ's desire for communion with us and His expectation of loving devotion in return.
- In the doctrine of Christian stewardship, we acknowledge Christ's ownership of the world and His magnanimity in requiring so little of us in tithe and offerings.
- It is the very doctrines that so many push aside as so many unnecessary accouterments that are, in reality, the very substance of Christ. Thus Jesus could declare definitively, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me,"

#### What About the Thief on the Cross?

It is often asserted that "you're only responsible for what you know." This leads some to embrace a "less is more" or "ignorance is bliss" ideology... that since I'm only responsible for what I know, then I'll make sure to know as little as possible. The truth is that in the sight of God, you're responsible both for what you know and for what you *could* know.

- The Sanhedrin's response to the truth Stephen told
- The response of Nicodemus and the lawyer of Luke 10

"I love you" is a hollow sentiment and utterly ridiculous notion if you know nothing about the person!

- "I just want someone to love me for me."

- Not for what clothes I wear, not for what food I like, not for where I choose to go, not for I have as friends, not for which books I read, not for words I use... and it sounds syrupy and romantic when in reality it is stupid and psychotic. Ok... but who are you?!

Character is the sum of your thoughts and actions. If someone claims to loves you but has no interest in nor knowledge of the things you think or the things you do, newsflash—THEY DON'T LOVE YOU!! Love requires knowledge!!

#### Sensual VS. Spiritual

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God described His character; the perfect synthesis of love and justice.

#### Doctrine Necessary for Baptism

- The Great Commission (Matthew 28)
- The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8)
- The road to Emmaus
- John 17:3 "This is life eternal that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
- 1 Peter 2:2, 3 (Desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow if you have tasted the grace of God)

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But aren't we supposed to love everybody? We can't possible know all the people we are supposed to love! And beyond that, some people are pretty awful! How can I possible love them?

- Matthew 25