

Summerlink: Christ Alone!

Introduction: *If Luther were here tonight:*

The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

Psalm 118:6-7

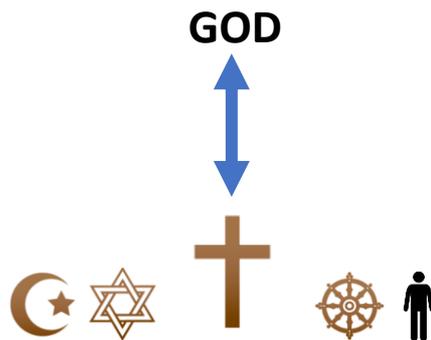
I. The Need for “Christ Alone”

Discussion:

Imagine you heard a street preacher on London Bridge saying, “We are saved through Christ alone!” Would you expect his message to be largely positive or negative? Why?

New scenario. Imagine a friend of yours has taken offence at Christ alone. What would you expect them to have taken offence at?

a. The Modern Challenge to “Christ Alone”: Christ Amongst and Exclusivity



So... “Christ Alone” is an attack on _____

b. The Medieval Challenge to “Christ Alone”: Christ Assisted-by and Sufficiency



- i. **Assistance with Access:** Priests, Baptism, Confession, Penance and Absolution

- ii. **Assistance with Approachability:** Mary and the Saints

- iii. **Self-Assisted:** Works
“You do your best, God does the rest.”

The Underlying Issue: Assistance with Attitude

“I hated this word ‘righteousness of God’, which by the customary use of all the doctors I had been taught to understand philosophically as what they call the *formal* or *active righteousness* whereby God is just and punishes unjust sinners. For my case was this: however irreproachable my life as a monk, I felt myself in the presence of God to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience, nor could I believe him to be appeased by the satisfaction I could offer.” **Luther’s “Autobiographical Fragment”**

Discussion:

At first glance, the idea that even Jesus is too great and too pure for us to reach without assistance looks very humble. What’s wrong with it on closer inspection?

c. The Problem with “Assisted-by”

- i. **Corruption**

- ii. **False confidence**

- iii. **Love and Trust**

“I teach that people should put their trust in nothing but Jesus Christ alone, not in their prayers, merits, or their own good ideas.”¹

2. Christ Alone!

a. Round I: Corruption!

¹ Martin Luther, “Letter to Johann von Staupitz (March 31, 1518),” in Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Zondervan, 2017).

b. Round 2: The Text!

Discussion:

Look at the following passages from Hebrews: 1:1-4; 4:14-16; 10:11-14. What do they say (or imply) about:

- ... The exclusivity / supremacy of Christ?
- ... The sufficiency of Christ? (And in what different ways is he sufficient?)
- ... The attitude of Jesus / God towards us?

i. **The Supremacy of Christ (Exclusivity)**

“But now he has spoken by his **Son**... [who is] as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs”

ii. **The Sufficiency of Christ**

a. **Revelation**

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... [who is] the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”

But that has implications for...

b. **Redemption**

“After making purification for sins, **he sat down**.”

“When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin, **he sat down** at the right hand of God... By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

iii. **The Approachability of Christ**

“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.”

“I am the Good Shepherd!”

iv. **Christ Alone!**

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him. (Heidelberg Catechism LD 1, 1563)

3. The Implications

a. Tearing up the Assistance System

Discussion:

We don't live in medieval Europe. How might we be tempted to put "assisters" between us and Christ? It might be worth thinking about:

- ... how we put other people between us and Jesus
- ... how we put our works between us and Jesus
- ... what you do when you know you've messed up

b. Joyful Confidence

"At this I felt myself straightway born afresh and to have entered through the open gates into paradise itself." **Luther's "Autobiographical Fragment"**

"We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is "of him." If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth... if we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of our heavenly kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgement, in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other." **John Calvin, Institutes, 2.16.19** (In Wellum, *Christ Alone*).

4. Conclusion: *If Luther were here tonight*

Psalm 118:6-7: The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?
The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

1. A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing;
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

3. And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed,
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! His doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

2. Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he!
Lord Sabaoth his name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.

4. That word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and his gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Martin Luther, tr. Frederick H. Hedge