
The Reformation @ 500

Solus Christus – Christ Alone

A Small-Group Discussion Guide

The start of the Protestant Reformation is often dated to Martin Luther nailing “The 95 Theses” to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany on Oct. 31, 1517. Historians reflecting on the Reformation and its meaning identify five statements or watchwords as central to the movement. These watchwords, called the five “solas” from the Latin word meaning “only” or “alone”, are: grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, and to God’s glory alone.

This fourth of five study guides explores *Christ Alone*, using reflections and insights gleaned from presentations made at an event held at Westwood Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg on October 29, 2016. The study guide invites participants beyond an academic discussion to tell stories of their understanding of who Jesus Christ is and the ways that understanding impacts how they live and think.

It would be useful for each participant to have a copy of the guide so they can have the italicized material in front of them.



Section I: Reflecting on our response to Jesus Christ

To paraphrase Mark 8: "Who do people say Jesus is?" What descriptions of Jesus do you hear in church, in the media, from friends?

How would you describe Jesus? Who do you say Jesus is?

Section II: In Jesus Christ God is reconciling all things

In Colossians 1:18, 19, Paul wrote "in Christ God was reconciling all things to God." (Read Colossians 1:15-20)

The word Reconciliation is widely used these days: separated couples reconcile; parents reconcile with children; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its report; in Colombia insurgents and government forces found reconciliation after 50 years of fighting; banks use the term as well.

How would you define reconciliation?

What would be included in "all things"? Is reconciliation limited to people being reconciled to people? What other things might be reconciled in Jesus Christ?

When have you witnessed/experienced God bringing about reconciliation in Jesus Christ?

Section III: Jesus Christ is the centre of the church

One way to create a group is highlighting the ways the members of the group are alike, being different from other people. The similarities become the important thing about the group. This is called a bounded set. When the Presbyterian church is described as a Scottish church; that is a bounded set.

A second way to gather people together is through a shared purpose or focus. This is called a centred set. In a centred set the similarities and differences between members in the group become less important than the members' shared focus. A congregation centred on Jesus is a centred set.

The church as described in the New Testament is a centred set. Thinking of your congregation: is it a bounded set or a centred set?

What practices could your congregation adopt that would nurture it as a centred set, focused on Jesus Christ?

Section IV: The cross-cultural Jesus

Common in Canadian church circles through the 19th century and into the 20th century was the view that good Christians made good Canadians. The assumption being the practices and lifestyle of being Canadian (that is, white European-Canadian) were the same as Christian practices and lifestyle. The mistaken understanding was that to be a Christian, individuals had to adopt Euro-Canadian patterns of life.

When have you experienced or observed Christianity practiced by people from non-Euro-Canadian cultures? What was that like? How was your understanding of Jesus Christ expanded by the Christian expression of people from non-Euro-Canadian cultures?

What parts of what is called Christian practices and patterns are drawn from Euro-Canadian culture rather than being what people who follow Jesus Christ are called to do?

What attitudes and commitments will help us move beyond a culturally bound Jesus to recognizing Jesus is for all cultures; that Jesus can be worshipped in any culture or language?

Section V: Jesus among the religions of the world

Living in a multi-religious world raises challenges for Christians who state that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. The question is asked, "How can Christians claim Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6) when there are followers of other religions who are nice, caring people?"

Do you know people who practice other world religions? Have you made connections with them? Have you talked to them about your faith? How did that go? If you did not talk about your faith, why didn't you?

Irma Fast Dueck told the story of being in an inter-religious dialogue with a Muslim. *The Muslim said to Fast-Dueck, "I need you to be a Christian in your talking about Jesus if this dialogue is going to work. Don't tell me something you think I want to hear, I need you to speak about who you believe Jesus is."*

What is your reaction to this Muslim's request? How might it change how you speak to people of other world religions?

Living Faith (a doctrinal standard of The Presbyterian Church in Canada) 9.2.1

*Some whom we encounter belong to other religions and already have a faith.
Their lives often give evidence of devotion and reverence for life.*

*We recognize that truth and goodness in them are the work of God's Spirit,
the author of all truth.*

*We should not address others in a spirit of arrogance implying that we are
better than they.*

*But rather, in the spirit of humility, as beggars telling others where food is to
be found, we point to life in Christ.*

How does this portion of *Living Faith* help us respond people who are followers of other religions? How might you point to "life in Christ"?

Section VI: Summing up

Name one way your understanding of Jesus Christ has been challenged or re-affirmed by this conversation.

Name one thing you will do, say, believe, or begin to change because of this conversation.

The "Christ alone" event was the fourth of five Ref@500 Project events taking place from 2013 to 2017. Sponsored by the Committee on History and funded through the support of the Ewart Endowment for Theological Education and the Conference Fund of the Life and Mission Agency, these events lead up to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

The project's purpose is to address the questions: What do the five "solos," so central to the Reformation, say to the church in Canada today? Are the 500-year-old theological slogans robust enough to be relevant today? For more information about the Reformation@500 Project or these study guides, contact Peter Bush, 197 Browning Blvd., Winnipeg, MB, R3K 0L1, email peterwwpres@mymts.net or call 204-837-5706.

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