

In CHRIST alone!

Luke Giles

Come with me to a church service 500 years ago. Your priest steps behind the altar. He, unlike you, is God's special instrument, possessed of supernatural power, able to "act in the person of Christ the Head" Indeed, that's why you call him, *father*, because, "he is the means by which Christ brings life to men". In a moment, he'll turn bread & wine into the actual body and blood of Christ and he'll offer Christ in sacrifice to God so you can participate in the forgiveness it wins: so you can be right with God. He, quite literally, holds your salvation in His hands—this, your mediator at the altar of the Mass. Without him, you'll never be right with God. Even with him and the 7 sacraments he holds over you, you'll need an indulgence or two, to cover incidental sins!

The Reformers would have none of that! Their resistance to the Mass & mediating role of the priests (as well as the pope and Mary) was deeply rooted in their convictions about Jesus. They were convinced it is "through Christ alone we are given salvation, blessedness, grace, pardon, and all that makes us in any way worthy in the sight of a righteous God" (Ulrich Zwingli)

We can be confident in two important elements of Christ alone:

1. Confident of Christ's SUFFICIENCY

The Reformation Cry is: justification by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. We have already seen that both grace and faith point us to Jesus. By *grace alone* points us to Jesus as the personification of God's kindness and mercy, given to those dead in their sin, so they can receive life. *Through faith alone* points us to Jesus as the object of our faith because He alone satisfied God's wrath justice as the atoning sacrifice. The Reformers understood that Jesus is not just a sacrifice, but the once for all sacrifice!

Nor did [Jesus] enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. **Hebrews 9:25-26**

Every year the high priest in Israel entered the tabernacle and killed an animal, whose blood covered the sins of the people. Every year! Another animal, another pool of blood, year in and year out. However, the writer of Hebrews gives us good news: Christ doesn't have to climb back up on the cross every year (or every week!) He's the High Priest who made the sacrifice and who was the sacrifice. He shed His blood once, for all of us. He did what no one else, not even the high priest of Israel, could do—He made the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for sins. Because the Jewish priest was never perfect, he wasn't qualified to sacrifice himself for our sin, and no single animal could fully satisfy God's wrath and justice toward sin. However, **as a sinless Man and a spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ was able to make the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for sin!**

Anything we have—any righteousness, any salvation, any hope—comes through that sufficient, once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus 2000 years ago. We can't add to it for it's already complete—it's finished. We can't add to something that's already satisfied. Jesus' death accomplished all it was meant to for us! That's why we don't need to offer Jesus on the altar over and over again. He died once-for-all.

It's why the writer describes Jesus as the Pioneer & Perfecter of our faith.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the *Pioneer and Perfecter* of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **Hebrews 12:1a-2**

When it comes to salvation through faith, it's none of us and all of Him. He's the beginning (*Author*) and the end (*Perfecter*), the One who blazed the trail

(Pioneer) and secured the end (Perfecter). Perfecter means to bring to completion. The salvation He won, He completes, making us mature in Him, lacking nothing! We don't need to offer Him over and over again. He offered Himself and sat down at God's right hand because it is finished! He starts it and He finishes it, that means we add nothing to it.

We can bring no other works, it is through Christ alone. Christ has done everything necessary to wash away our sins, cleanse our consciences, and bring us to God—what more can we do? We need to rethink the Mass—the continual offering of the sacrifice on the altar versus the once-for-all, never to be repeated, full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice on the cross. Nothing you can add to the completed work of Christ. He's done it all!

“If you want to make atonement apart from Christ the Mediator, making your own works the mediation between God and yourself, you will inevitably fail, as Lucifer did... and in horrible despair, lose God and everything!” **Martin Luther**

Therefore, rejoice in and rest in the sufficient work of Jesus!

2. Confident in the EXCLUSIVITY of Christ

Connected to sufficiency, is exclusivity. Through Jesus we're made right with God and so reconciled to God, *but **only** through Him!* Jesus himself, said He is the only way! “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” **John 14:6**.

There aren't multiple ways to be declared righteous and be reconciled to God. There aren't different paths that lead to eternal life. Who has paid the ransom? Who was raised victorious over death? Who mediates the new covenant? Who saves the lost? Jesus Christ, and no-one else!

Jesus alone reveals God and the truth about God. Jesus alone defeats death and offers eternal life. There is no other way to the Father but through the Son!

Because of His way of suffering on the cross, He alone is the way of salvation for the church. That means all roads don't lead to righteousness. There is only one way—Christ alone. That is exactly the opposite of what Universalism says!

Thus, Jesus is the only Mediator.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. **1 Timothy 2:5-6**

His sufficient sacrifice makes Him the only Mediator. No-one else can stand between you and God—not the priest, not the pope, not an angel, not the saints gone ahead and not even Mary!

Luther was so horrified at the thought, when those leaving the Roman Catholic church started calling themselves Lutherans, he said this: “The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone... how did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name?” He was convinced, no-one stands between God and His people, except Christ alone. He alone is our Saviour and Mediator!

There is no other way, it is through Christ alone. If His sufficiency made us rethink the Mass; His exclusivity demands we rethink the priest.

If Christ has done everything necessary as our great high priest to wash away our sins, cleanse our consciences and bring us to God, why do we need an additional human priest to be inserted into the process—unless there is something unfinished or inadequate about Christ's priesthood?

Why create a class of indispensable human priests to stand between us and Christ when the New Testament knows nothing of the idea? Indeed, the New Testament never calls church leaders priests. It calls them elders, overseers, servants, shepherds—but never priests. That's because the New Testament recognises there's one High Priest—Jesus—but, significantly, calls all His followers priests, “*a kingdom of priests*”. This is the priesthood of all believers.

The New Testament says that because Christ, the great and final Mediator, has dealt with sin and reconciled us to God, all Christians have the privileges of priests—all of us can draw near to God with confidence through the blood of Christ; every believer can approach God directly without the aid of another in full assurance of faith; we can all enter God's very presence and offer ourselves as living sacrifices!

If you have Jesus, you have everything you need to get to God because He is the way! My prayers are no more powerful than yours and I'm no closer to God than you are!

In Christ alone

Only God can save us, and only God could step foot on earth's soil and not be eternally tainted by its brokenness. Those every-year sacrifices pointed to a man who would not only stand in the gap as a priest but would also shed His blood as the sufficient sacrifice. Jesus lived the perfect life that Adam (and the rest of us) couldn't live. **The sufficient & exclusive work of Christ alone is therefore all we need for salvation.**