

CHRIST ALONE
Sermon Series: Distinctiveness of Presbyterians
May 31, 2015 –John 14: 1-7
The Church of the Covenant

Presbyterians have set forth what the church believes in a 343 page document, containing 11 Confessions, or statements of belief, in “The Book of Confessions”. As a Presbyterian minister you are never taught this document in seminary nor required to study or know it, but when I was in the process of becoming a Presbyterian minister more than 30 years ago I spent a lot of time studying the entire document from cover to cover. I read all the footnotes and read and researched all the Biblical citations. I read books about the Confessions. So it both irks me today when someone makes a comment like, “The Presbyterian Church doesn’t believe in Jesus.” (there are 343 pages attesting to the fact that it does). Or equally irksome to me is the fact that in many ways the Presbyterian Church has forgotten its believing heritage and has adopted a smorgasbord, “believe whatever you want” kind of approach. As part of our current Confirmation Class I was asked to speak to our confirmands about what Presbyterians believe and so took what scholars often believe are the great synopsis of what Reformed Theology, the Protestant Reformation and the Book of Confessions say are the core of what we believe. These are set forth in 5 statements summarized in the Latin as “The Five Solas” –*Solus Christus* (Christ Alone), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (To the Glory of God Alone). I dedicate these next 5 sermons to our Confirmation Class whose questions have inspired these sermons. By the way, next Sunday they will be making their public profession of faith in Jesus Christ ALONE so we will all want to be here to encourage and support them in this important step of faith.

The earliest conflict in the church of Jesus Christ was when the earliest Christians who were all Jewish, said to the newer, incoming Christians, who were mostly Gentile, non-Jewish, that they had to become Jews before they became Christians. (See generally, Acts 10, 11 and 12) They had to adopt the entirety of the Old Testament law, they had to ascribe to strict Jewish dietary laws, they had to become circumcised before they became Christian. They were saying in effect, “It is NOT Christ Alone. It is Christ AND you have to do this also.” The Council of Jerusalem said, “Nope. Its Christ alone.” Human beings by our very nature always want to add something. We are never happy with what is, we have to tack on something else, we have to add the “AND”. Somehow we think it is our right and privilege to tack on to the perfected work of the Lord Jesus Christ something else. We say, in effect, “No, Jesus, your death on the cross isn’t sufficient, your resurrection wasn’t enough, your life, death and resurrection isn’t complete in and of itself. You were wrong when you shouted from the cross with your last breath, “It is finished”.” It isn’t finished, Lord Jesus. I have to add some things and tack on some things and add an “AND” to what you have done. Nope. Beloved, It is by Christ Alone –No “AND” is necessary.

Our scripture is the famous one from the Gospel of John the 14th chapter, where Jesus states: “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.*” (John 14: 6) Jesus makes a brash and bold claim and it is this –“It is by CHRIST ALONE.” “*I am the way*”, says Jesus. I am the path. I am the journey. Come and follow me and you will find everything and anything that will bless you in your life. He doesn’t say, “I know the path” or “I point out the path to you.” No, He says, “I am the path; I am the road; I am the journey” Come, follow me. And then He says, “*I am the truth.*” I am not one of many truths; I am the truth above every truth. Indeed you cannot know any truth in this life without first knowing me. He doesn’t say, “I preach the truth”; nor, “I know the truth”; nor “I am a great Rabbi of the truth.” No, He says, “*I AM the truth.*” The Bible says, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set

you free. And when you are free in Jesus, you are free indeed!" Jesus, as the journey, leads us to the truth that shall set us free. And then Jesus says, *"I am the life"*. As the author of life, says Jesus, as the Word of life, there is no true life apart from me on this earth. Parents, all your shuttling around of your children will not give them life. All of their busyness and activities will not give your children life. AND All of the abundant and free and victorious life you want your children to have will not come from soccer, AND music lessons, AND dance lessons, AND whatever else; the life you seek to give to your children comes from Christ Alone. No "ANDS" about it. And then if there was any doubt what Jesus means, He then summarizes it brilliantly and says: *"No one comes to the Father but by me."* (John 14: 6) There is no other path, no other way, no other journey to get to God except by me, says Jesus. There is no other truth, no other form of intellectual knowledge, no innate human wisdom apart from me, says Jesus. There is no true life to live in isolation from me, says Jesus. Oh, and by the way, there is no way on your own apart from me that you can somehow work your way up to God. There is no way to enter into God's presence but by me. No way to know God apart from me. And in that day when you die, there is no way to enter into the gates of heaven except by the perfected work I have done for you at Calvary. Says Jesus: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."* It is BY CHRIST ALONE.

And you say to me, "Well, of course, Stu, I believe in all of that." Except of course, for those other things you add to the equation. Except, of course, for the AND that you add to "Christ Alone" as in, It is Christ AND thing other thing....Some think you have to dress a particular way –"You need to wear T-shirts and shorts or I won't respect you. OR, you need to wear a sport coat and tie." That's making it about something else. Or perhaps you think, "Well, it really is about contemporary worship. OR it really is about traditional worship." Then you're making it about something other than "Christ Alone." Or perhaps you want to link Jesus with some political philosophy, as in, Well, obviously Jesus would be a democrat, OR Jesus would be a republican." Trust me, God has no political affiliation. It is in Christ alone. Or perhaps it is the thought I had during Pastor Emily's great sermon on Pentecost, where the disciples are gathered in an upper room and praying and they are doing so because Jesus has told them to do this. And they are waiting and they are praying. As Presbyterians we would have had a meeting and tried to organize world evangelism. We'll get info packets and hang them on every door in Jerusalem and then folks will believe. But God's plan was Pentecost and God's plan was the Holy Spirit. We would have made it about Christ AND OUR PLAN. And then we would get frustrated when everyone didn't agree with our plan and when our plan only marginally worked. It's not about Christ AND our plan; Christ IS OUR PLAN. That's why the mission statement that you approved long before I arrived here is this –"To know Christ and make Him known to the next generation." If I added one thing I would add this –"To know Christ ALONE and make HIM ALONE known to the next generation." Or we add particular beliefs or theological perspectives as in, "You have to believe this OR you have to think this way about that OR you have to use my particular buzz words or you're not one of us, you're one of them." No that's making it about CHRIST AND something else. Or maybe we put someone in a particular box and assign "You're a bad person" to that box OR maybe someone places themselves in some box and they think "Oh, I can't be a Christian because the church would reject me." That's making it about something other than Christ Alone. Nope. Everybody needs the Lord. Everybody can come to Jesus. Everybody has an opportunity to follow the One who is the way, truth and life. Or maybe we think it has to be our way, or according to our process and we get frustrated when it doesn't happen "our way". Then we are making about something else other than "Christ Alone." As human beings we always want to add something to the perfected and completed work of Jesus. We always want to make it about the "AND". And then we wonder why there are disagreements and divisions and frustrations.

And when we do, when we add something to Christ Alone, then we are amazed when people disagree, and it is off-putting, and we become frustrated or even angry. Jesus says, *“If I, even I, be lifted up I will draw all men (all people) unto me.”* He says, if you just lift me up, if you just proclaim me and the cross, if you just hold before people the love of God I embody, if you just lift me up, Christ Alone, nothing else, not adulterated with anything else, nothing added, *“If I, just I, be lifted up, He promises I will draw all people unto myself”*. Its pretty obvious we’re not lifting up “Christ Alone” anymore –“NOTE TO CHURCH” the world is not beating a path to our door anymore. Because, may I say, there is something incredibly winsome about Jesus alone. Not all the things we as the church add to Him, but just Christ alone. There is something powerfully alluring about the pure love of God. There is something winning about the story of Jesus loving us so much He goes to the cross and dies for us “when we were yet sinners”. There is something in Jesus that conquers the human heart. Before we had done even one good thing, before we were ever even born, before we ever tried to add one thing, one “AND” to the perfect plan of God, Jesus loved us, and lived for us, and was resurrected for us and died for us and poured out His love for us. Why do we need more than that?

Jesus must have been the most amazing person who ever walked the face of this earth. God in human form, when He looked into your eyes, you saw the eternal staring back at you. In HIM alone, was the journey to truth and life and abundant life and eternal life made complete. You were around Him and you just knew it in your heart. He spoke and you heard the voice of God. He looked into your face and you beheld all the love that God has for you. It is why when He walked the shore of the Galilean Sea He went up to people who did not know Him, He looked them deeply in the eye, and He said *“Come, follow me.”* I love it when scripture records they “immediately” dropped their nets and followed Him. They dropped all the “ANDS” in life, everything that human beings try to add to the Almighty, and they knew they had found everything and anything they ever needed. They had looked into the face of Jesus and immediately knew Him as the way, the truth and the life...and the only pathway to God.

Christ is here. Jesus is looking into your eyes and into your soul. He says to you, *“Come, follow me.”* Lay down the ANDS and the add-ons you always place on God, all these “nets” which ensnare you and keep you from me. Follow me, says Jesus. I am the way and I am the truth and I am the life you seek. What you have sought you have now found. What you have long longed for has found its fulfillment in me.

Who will follow **Christ Alone** today? And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

(I was inspired in the writing of this sermon by an article in “Theology Matters”, January 2013, namely “Falling Short of the Solas”, written by my friend and colleague in ministry, The Reverend Carolyn Poteet, of Waynesburg University. *Soli Deo Gloria*)