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PREFACE
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In 2008, United Reformed minister and professor Michael Horton published his *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*. This was a devastating critique of American evangelicalism and its woeful neglect of the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ. However, for a discerning reader, Horton’s analysis also had a finger pointed at Reformed churches. “Christless Christianity” is not just a Joel Osteen or Joyce Meyer thing. It is also something which can easily afflict churches which hold to the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards. It is a toxin which can also get into our ecclesiastical bodies.

There is a saying that “the Reformed church is always reforming.” We Reformed folk often like to have things in Latin, so it is *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*. But “reforming” according to what? The answer is the Bible. We constantly have to be going back to what the Scriptures teach. In every generation, we conscientiously have to conform ourselves to the Word of God. As we do that, we are brought back to the antidote to “Christless Christianity.” The biblical antidote to that toxic form of the faith is Christ alone – or to have it in Latin again, *solus Christus*. That is what this little book is about. It is about bringing us back to one of the essential basics of orthodox confessional Christianity.

The three chapters following were originally delivered as talks at the Reformation Conference hosted by the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore in October 2016. They were subsequently also given as talks at the Family Camp of the Southern Presbyterian Church in Hobart, Tasmania in March 2017. They have been slightly edited for publication in this format. Two sermons preached in Singapore and Hobart have also been included as appendices.

One last matter – and again it has to do with Latin. The title of the book is *Solus Christus*. But sometimes you will see this “sola” of the Reformation as *solo Christo*. Why and which is correct? The answer is: both. Latin is what linguists call an inflected language. It has a case system whereby the forms of nouns change according to the way the noun is used grammatically in the sentence. *Solus Christus* is the nominative form – it means “Christ alone,” as in “Christ alone is our Saviour.” *Solo Christo* is the ablative form – it means “by Christ alone,” as in “We are saved by Christ alone.” One can use either, but for the sake of consistency, I have opted to use the nominative in the title and throughout this book.

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Chapter 1

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CHRIST ALONE: A BIBLICAL AND
CONFSSIONAL OVERVIEW
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Solus Christus (Christ alone) is one of the five “pillars” of the Reformation. The major issues in debate at the time of the Reformation can be condensed under these five headings:

Sola Scriptura – by Scripture alone. The Bible alone is our authority.

Sola Gratia – by grace alone. We are saved only by God’s grace apart from human works.

Sola Fide – by faith alone. We are justified only by faith in Jesus Christ.

Solus Christus – Christ alone. There is only one Redeemer.

Soli Deo Gloria – to the glory of God alone. God alone receives the praise for salvation.

Our attention in this book is going to be focused on *Solus Christus*, but certainly the other “solas” are also going to come up. All these truths are intertwined and ultimately inseparable.

In our day the notion of “Christ Alone” has received a lot of attention in Protestant, evangelical churches. This is a good thing -- something for which to be thankful. A lot of the credit for this goes to a song with those words in the title, “In Christ Alone.” I am sure you have heard it before and it may even be a favourite. Originally written by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, it is now one of the most popular modern Christian songs. An easy-to-sing Celtic melody combines with deep theological lyrics and an experiential accent -- it impacts listeners. Many cover versions have been done and it has been translated into many different languages. In a world where there is so much Christian music just better left forgotten, “In Christ Alone” stands out as having lasting significance. People will almost

certainly still be singing it 50 years from now, maybe even 100 or more years from now.

But the popularity of that one song does not mean this pillar of the Reformation is always understood properly or believed. It does not mean it is appreciated. It does not mean it is never undermined. In fact, the opposite is true - “Christ Alone” has many skeptics and challengers. That is why it is good that we focus our attention on it, understand what it means, why it is important, and how to respond to those who deny it or undermine it. That is what we are going to be looking at in the pages which follow.

What Does the Bible Say?

As mentioned above, another one of the pillars of the Reformation is *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone. We believe that the Bible alone is our authoritative source for doctrine and life. Thus it makes sense that we take our starting point in what the Bible teaches. What does the Bible say about “Christ Alone”?

Here the temptation might be to skip right to the New Testament. After all, that is where you find Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, the Son of God takes on human flesh and walks this earth. The New Testament describes his ministry and then the teachings of the apostles about Jesus. Certainly all that is true. But we not only believe *Sola Scriptura*, we also believe *Tota Scriptura* – which means, we believe the whole Bible is our authority for doctrine and life. We need to pay attention to the whole of Scripture, both the New *and* the Old Testament.

If *Solus Christus* is really as significant as we think it is, we would expect to find at least traces or hints of it in the Old Testament. Certainly we do. We find *shadows* of this theme already in the Old Testament.

In the broadest sense, we could think of those places in the Old Testament speaking of salvation as coming only from God. There are several passages that could be mentioned, but Psalm 62 is a good example. David says God only is his rock and his salvation. He has no other hope but in God. That shows that, for Old Testament believers, they understood that our help comes only from above. If we are going to be saved, that help cannot come

the gospel and away from Christ alone as our saving hope. It is *so easy* to lose your focus on him. All it takes is a little pride or complacency. All it takes is the attitude that you can stay home from the preaching of the gospel every now and then, because you are quite strong and you do not really need it. No! We need it all the time. We constantly need to get refocused on Christ alone. Holding to him only is not something that comes naturally to us. We need the Word of God as we read it for ourselves, but most importantly we need the preaching of Christ the only Saviour to keep us fixed on him. A regular diet of the Word is the only cure for our spiritual attention deficit disorder.

“Christ alone” – in this chapter, we have seen it taught in Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament. We have seen how this truth was lost and then recovered by the Reformation. We have seen how this truth was expressed in our Reformed confessions. Next we’ll look at some of the challenges to this truth in our day.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Psalm 23 point us to the reality of “Christ alone”?
2. Can you think of any other types, figures or shadows that point to “Christ alone” in the Old Testament?
3. The author mentioned the song “In Christ Alone” early in this chapter. Examine your church’s hymn collection to see where this theme explicitly comes to expression.
4. *Solus Christus* is taught in Scripture and expressed in the Reformed confessions, but do our churches emphasize this truth enough? Why or why not?
5. Evaluate this statement: “Our Reformed churches, because they emphasize keeping the obligations of the covenant so much, in effect deny the biblical teaching of ‘in Christ alone.’ They might confess ‘in Christ alone,’ but they also teach that it is not just Christ’s work that gives you a relationship with God, but also your own efforts at obedience to God’s law.”