

Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God Alone)

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[0 : 00] Well, now, I wish you good morning. I am very glad to be with you once again. And once again, let me say at once, I am speaking to order, and I'm not quite sure what is required by the people who gave me my subject. Yes, the subject itself is clear enough as a phrase, solely Deo Gloria, glory be to God alone. And as Olaf said, it was indeed a tag, you could call it a motto, from the days of the Reformation. It's a phrase that had been used prior to the Reformation by a number of theologians. It's a phrase which isn't very often used today, but when it does appear, it's usually on the lips of people who still want to wave the flag in favour of the

Reformation and celebrate the fact that out of the Reformation heritage, we still draw great good for church life today, all of which I agree with. But still, it doesn't tell me exactly how I'm to angle my talk on solely Deo Gloria. As a tag phrase, it can be used in more than one way, with more than one thrust. You can use it as a directive phrase, all thought and all life should be, for the glory of God alone. We can use it as a phrase for admonishing each other. Remember, what you do, what you say, what you think, anything that you allow yourself to utter in a talk, must be, for the glory of God alone, so watch it. And more generally, we can use the phrase, as I said, as a motto for the style of our living. As Christian people, right-minded, we hope, we see the centre of life in terms of praising God, thanking God, celebrating God, and we are in effect saying to ourselves and saying to each other, see what our God has done and is doing.

Isn't it wonderful? Let us give praise to him for all of that. Sole Deo Gloria. Well, saying that, I hope, shows you that I did have to scratch my head a little to decide how I would open up this theme for today's talk. What I'm going to do is offer you, in detail, two definitions and a declaration. Between them, these three divisions will, I hope, cover the whole field that should be covered, shall I say, as a minimum, if you're going to talk about glory to God alone. And it may be that I shall be saying some things which are helpful in other ways as we go along. You shall be the judge.

My first definition, and the one that will take, I think, most of my time, is the definition of God himself. Glory to God alone. Who is God? What is God? Here, I suspect, there's a gap.

Between the kind of thing that we assert from the podium in theological colleges, seminaries, and institutions like Regent, and what is in the minds of people who worship with us in church on Sunday.

[4 : 54] There is a fairly standard way of presenting the doctrine of God. And most folk who worship with us on Sunday have never been presented with it, I think, and therefore don't know it. Some pick it up as they go along.

Some remain fuzzy, really, when faced with the question, who and what is God. They remain fuzzy to the end of their lives for want of any pattern of truth and wisdom on the subject ever having been presented to them.

Well, I don't know where you are, brothers and sisters, on this one, but I'm going to offer you a definition, or if you like, an analysis, of who and what God is, based loosely on the kind of thing that we say in college lectures, and I hope it will bring some clarity right at the outset of our exploration. So, the very first question to ask when you're approaching the theme of who and what God is, is the question, how do you know? How do we know? The question of the knowledge of God.

We in this room, I guess, are most of us, perhaps all of us, evangelical, and whether we are evangelical or not, we are persons, I guess, who have learned to love the Bible, or we wouldn't be linked with St. John's at all.

[6 : 44] And, yes, it is through the Bible, from the Bible, that we come to know, with precision, who and what God is.

God, in fact, we discover from the Bible, has revealed himself, and the Bible lays out the revelation.

God reveals himself in four relationships, basically, as creator of ourselves and everything that is, as sustainer of ourselves and everything that is, now that it's created, as redeemer of ourselves and the rest of mankind, the rest of the human race, we are a lost lot, sinners and grievously astray, and we need redeeming. God has moved to redeem us.

And then, fourth relationship, God appears in the Bible as restorer, as the creator contemplating a cosmos that is now in a state of disorder, and planning to put it to rights, as Tom Wright loves to express it, to restore order where there's disorder, and to give the cosmos the quality of excellence and praiseworthiness that he always intended it should have, but which, for the time being, it's lost by virtue of sin, sin as a disruptive factor that has entered in, sin originally stemming from an angelic revolt, sin infecting the cosmos in ways which exceed our understanding, sin as needing to be removed from the scene, eliminated by a reconstructive use of the same power that created the world in the first place.

Well, yes, all of that we learn from the Bible. Equally, we learn it from the Christian heritage. This is the essential message that the Church has been proclaiming ever since the days of the Apostles.

[9 : 45] It may help you at this point to think of a cultural institution which I don't think exists here and which you may never have heard of.

It's the Advanced Driving Test in Britain. Has anyone ever heard of the Advanced Driving Test?

Okay, you know what it's about then.

Well, for those of you who don't know, let me say, the Advanced Driving Test is what it sounds like. It's a test for those who've passed the Ordinary Driving Test and wish to qualify themselves at a higher level.

And one of the things that you have to do in the Advanced Driving Test, or at least one of the things that you had to do in the Advanced Driving Test half a century ago when a friend of mine took it and could never cease to talk about it because he found it such a harrowing experience, what he had to do, he found, was not only to drive correctly through traffic but to give the examiner a running commentary on all that he was doing as he drove.

Why am I speeding up? Why am I slowing down? Why am I changing gear? Why am I signaling in this way and that way? And so on and so forth.

[11 : 14] And the quality of his running commentary was one of the factors on which he was graded and on which his passing, or not passing the test, he did pass it, I must say, his passing of the test depended.

Well, that is a faint analogy of God and the Bible. Can you see it already? God is driving.

Oh, yes, he is. God is creating everything that exists. God is ordering everything that happens.

God's hand is everywhere.

There's nothing that is not under his sovereign control. Now, in addition to all of that, he has given us what we may fairly describe as a running commentary on what he's up to.

The books of the Bible, one after the other, came into existence through the process we call inspiration. The content of these books is what we call revelation.

[12 : 36] The books, in short, are God telling us what he has been doing, what he is doing, what he's going to do, and what he calls on us to do to inherit the quality of life and joy that he always intended human beings to have, but which we have lost through sin.

The cosmic infection, as I described it a moment ago. Well, the Church has been studying the Bible for 2,000 years, and it's fair to say we have a fairly detailed idea now of, shall I say, what it's all about as the Bible presents it.

And by the way, when we read the Bible, I hope we read it in these terms, I have spoken of God as its author, and I will continue to speak of God as its author.

Why? Well, because the Lord Jesus and the Apostles, when they quote Scripture, regularly ascribe it to God as its author.

They know, of course, that God used human writers in order to put it all down on paper and every now and then they will cite the human writer rather than saying simply, as God tells us.

[14 : 17] So they ascribe quotes from the Psalms to David and quotes from the prophets from time to time to Isaiah. They are as aware of the human authorship of Scripture as they are of its divine authorship.

But they're quite clear in their minds. This is Jesus and his apostles, remember, who themselves are the standard for our doctrine. They are quite clear in their own minds that God is the primary

author of Scripture and that though the books are as truly human products as they are divine products, in the sense, I mean, that the human writers put themselves into the work of composing them and all the qualities, the human qualities, that you look for in any books or pieces of writing, they're all there.

It would be quite wrong to think of the Bible as produced through the agency of robots. It wasn't like that at all.

God used human authors who, in their turn, were using their minds to collect materials, sort it out, think it through, get a plan for, draw up a plan for each book and then write the book according to the plan, the way that authors of books do today, believe me.

But the primary author is God. The distinction, by the way, the verbal distinction between primary and secondary authors dates from the 17th century.

[16:10] It may be found in the Reformers, but I haven't found them using it as a regular distinction. 17th century men do, though.

And it's a perfectly straightforward distinction once it's explained. And it does very clearly, I think, indicate how we should be reading the Bible.

It's a both-and business. Read it as a human book, witnessing to God. Read it as a divine book, God witnessing to himself.

It's both. And 100% both. And that's how it is that we know about God and can be confident of the truth and wisdom of the things we know.

The text of Scripture ultimately comes from God himself who gave us language in order that there might be communication between him and us.

[17:22] And one of the forms of that communication is written communication. And one final thing to say about our Bible reading and Bible study is that when we open the text of Scripture, we should think, not simply that, yes, long ago God inspired this for all his people in every generation to learn from, but we should also think, and God speaks what he spoke directly, here and now, to me, who I'm reading it.

There's a quote that I, can I remember it? I think I can, from Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish 19th century Protestant scholar, the Melancholy Dane, as he's sometimes called.

And it's a quote of something that he wrote for his own instruction. When I read the Bible, says Kierkegaard, I must remember that God is speaking here and speaking to me.

And yes, that's Kierkegaard expressing what I am trying to express at this very moment. The Bible is what God wrote or had written.

and the Bible is what God says. Here and now, to you and me. Okay, well, there's my summary answer to the question, how is it that we know about God?

[19:20] Now, the further question, of course, how do we know God relationally? But at the moment, I'm just talking in relation to the first question, how do we know about God?

And my definition of God, to which I now move, is going to answer that question, what do we know about God?

What God has always been? What God has told all his people in Scripture that he is? this is consensus stuff. Protestant consensus stuff, yes, and Catholic consensus stuff, and there's no difference, basically, between the way that Protestants and Catholics conceive things when they're asked to declare who and what God is.

So, simple, here's a simple Catholic, small c, a simple Catholic mainstream account of God, according to the Scriptures.

We ask some questions in order to set our inquiries going. there are four questions I'm going to pose and try to ask.

[20:48] How does God exist? How does God behave? How is God both singular and plural?

And what is God doing at present? Alright? Here we go. How does God exist? Here we focus on the being of God, the God who is there.

What can we say about him as the God who is there? And the short answers, none of which am I going to elaborate in detail here, can be summarized like this.

God is one. There is only one of his kind. He is unique. He is the only one. God is infinite.

There are no bounds to his being. He is, if you like to put it this way, unlimited. He is eternal.

[22:01] He doesn't change from one generation to another. He certainly doesn't weaken as time goes by in the way that you and I, his human creatures, weaken as time goes by.

no, he is eternally the same and he is self-sustaining in the sense that he has within himself the secret of perpetual energy.

We creatures don't, but he, the creator, does. there is a technical term which the theologians are constantly using and which most lay folk frankly never meet.

It's the term aseity. Anybody here ever heard the word aseity before I used it a moment ago? Well, if you know any Latin, you will recognize that it's a word formed from the Latin, a means from, and say means himself.

And aseity is the quality of drawing life from himself so that he never runs out of steam. As I said, there's nothing in the created order to match that.

[23 : 32] But that is how God is. He is the one eternal God. And as I said, unchanging both in his powers to which we move now, and in his moral character of which I shall speak in a minute.

Powers, yes, there are three words. They form a group, and if you can remember one, it's easy to remember the other two. God is omniscient.

he knows quite literally everything that there is to know. Everything that there is to know about everything that he has made.

Everything that there is to know down to the most exhaustive end point which he can identify but we can't.

in our knowledge of created things and of ourselves among them, well, the inquiry into what it is, in our case, what we are, is an inquiry that never ends.

[24 : 52] I mean, we always have to leave it open-ended. There is more to be discovered, more at the miniaturizing end of things, more in terms of the cosmic relationships between things.

Mystery, in other words, that is unknown reality, circumscribes all the clear knowledge that we have about the nature of things and similarly all the clear knowledge that the Bible gives us about the nature of God.

God's knowledge is exhaustive. He knows literally everything about literally everything. And he is omnipresent.

There is no spot in his universe in which he is not present. our universe, of course, is essentially a three-dimensional business.

The learned have found ways of conceiving further dimensions which join up with and operate within the three dimensions that we are aware of.

[26 : 25] But God himself is not dimensionally bound. He has neither height, breadth, or depth.

These qualities, these dimensional aspects of existence, they are all of them elements of the created order.

God is not bound by them. God, to use the word that theologians use, transcends one. In other words, there is more to him than can be said, can be expressed, in terms of the three dimensions that I have referred to.

you. But in terms of those three dimensions, we know what presence is. We, in this room, are all present to each other.

Sure we are. And life is like that. In this world, well, juxtaposition means presence.

[27 : 39] We are alongside each other. We are present to each other. you can juxtapose yourself with flowers, with trees, with mountains.

You put yourself alongside them, you put them alongside yourself. Once again, you have the reality of presence and you will describe it in terms of I love being present with whoever or whatever it is that you are thinking of.

Sure. But with God, the limits of presence, thus understood, I mean, the fact that presence only operates when you are, in fact, close to or juxtaposed with something or other or someone or other, those limitations, that or that limitation doesn't apply.

God is present, close to, we might say, close to and indeed eminent within literally every thing, item, unit in the cosmos, literally every person in the cosmos, every thing, every element.

God is present with it or with him or her. God permeates it or him or her.

[29 : 22] There is no dimension of reality as we know it from which God is absent. and then on top of omniscience and omnipresence there is the quality that we label omnipotence, the one you were waiting for, yes, the God who is present everywhere in and with everything, the God who knows everything from every angle and in relation to everything else, that same God has in himself the power to do everything that he wants to do.

The latter phrase, everything that he wants to do, is important because it rules out a whole lot of foolish talk, which nonetheless has been quite widespread in our English speaking world about the supposed problems of omnipotence.

Can God make a rock too heavy for him to lift? Problems like that. Well, such problems are trivial, frivolous, goofy.

omnipotence means that God has the power to do everything that he wants to do. What he wants to do is shaped, shall I say, by his moral character, which we come to in a minute.

He only wants to do things that are good. And his creativity, creativity, which no one can conceive or predict until he shows it in action, his creativity prompts him to decide what it is that he's going to do.

[31 : 35] That is how God exists. So, in his world, he has dominion, he's in charge of everything, he has sovereignty, he's in control of everything, he is the Lord, and the world is his workmanship, and the means of his self expression.

He didn't have to create, so it seems from scripture, but he chose to. And none of the things that happen in this world at his prompting had to happen.

I mean, he didn't have to choose to do them, to initiate them, to create the situation in which they would happen, but in his creativity he has done so, and so the ongoing processes of the cosmos, they're all shrouded around their outer edge, so to speak, in mystery, that is, reality which passes our understanding, that's the definition of mystery that I'd like you to have in mind for this talk, at the, yes, at the outer limits of everything that we know, there's always mystery, that is a condition of created life in God's created world, world, but of course, that doesn't apply to God, no, this is how God exists, have you got the idea?

It blows the mind, doesn't it? Well, yes it does, but at the same time, it's biblical truth, one could turn up many scriptures in which all these factors that I've mentioned are embodied in non-technical terminology, and there isn't any dispute within historic Christianity that this is how God exists.

And now we come to the question of how God behaves, the question of his moral character, and here again, Catholics, Protestants, all representatives of historic Christianity are agreed, there's nothing disputable here.

[34 : 15] Character of God, there's a comprehensive word in the Bible which operates as what a professor of my youth used to call, operates as a concertina word, do you know what a concertina is?

It's the, that's right, it's the grandfather of the accordion, you could think of it as an accordion word if you want to, you press the bellows in and out as you hold the instrument in your hand and you play the tune from buttons if it's a concertina or notes if it's an accordion which you manipulate with your fingers as you move the bellows in and out.

Alright, so you know what a concertina is. A concertina word is a word which sometimes has a very broad inclusive meaning, bellows extended, and sometimes has a much more narrow and precise meaning, bellows closed.

the word in question is the word holy. The Bible speaks of God as holy, and sometimes when it does so, it's expressing, by the use of the word holy, an awareness of all the ways in which God's existence is in contrast with ours.

ours, you see, is dependent and limited existence, God's existence is eternal, independent, and he has qualities and powers that we don't have.

[36 : 14] Alright, sometimes the word holy expresses all of that, and when we join the angels saying, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, I think we ought to be using the word in that broad sense, Lord, you're different from us, you are better than us, you are more glorious than we are at every point whatever.

But then sometimes the word holy is used quite precisely, quite narrowly, for moral purity, purity of kind, that any form of moral transgression or misdemeanor disrupts.

There is in God no operation, no movement that in any way disrupts moral perfection.

That's the other thing that the word holy is saying. well, let's break it down. What does moral perfection, as we see it in the Bible, in God, involve?

Basically, it involves the quality of goodness or love, along with the qualities of faithfulness, truthfulness, that is, justice, wisdom, and a relational capacity, which it is God's will to articulate, I mean, to realize and put to work in actual relations with humans on the one hand and angels on the other.

[38 : 26] Perhaps it would be better to say with humans and angels and the whole world of animate creatures below the level of the human.

animals, I mean, and once you start, where do you stop? Animals, birds, insects, and so it goes on. But the point which remains stable and fixed is that God, in his creative wisdom, relates to all these people, animals, animals, angels, birds, bees, insects, whatever.

It's another thought that blows the mind, of course. We creatures can't take the measure of God, however bright we may seem to be by comparison with our human peers.

But no, we're talking now about God. God related to everything, and his relationships, our purposeful relationships, he relates, that is, to things and people because he has a plan that involves them, and communication, at least with angels and with humans, is part of that plan, because out of the relationship, he wants fellowship.

I don't know what to say about fellowship between God and the cats and the dogs and the budgerigars and so on, with whom we humans have limited but real relationships, and the relationships bring us much joy, sure.

[40 : 33] We don't relate to beetles in quite the same way, at least most of us don't, but the thing we must say about God is that he is related to everything that is animate in any sense at all, and he has a purpose for it, he knows what he's doing with it, and we living our lives, and sometimes kidding ourselves about our own independence, we're not really independent at all.

God overrules everything that we do, and integrates it into the plan that he's formed, so that understanding human life and behavior is a both and business, yes, we are made in such a way that we do our own thinking, make our own decisions, we are responsible human beings, answerable for what we do, and we are not conscious of divine control at any point at all. we may certainly believe that we have the mind of God as to what we should do, but then, yes, we pray and ask for help, but when push comes to shove, we do it, we get up and move into action, yes, yes, but nonetheless, even as we do so, and as we look back on what we've done, we should realize, God was overruling all that I thought, all that I said, all that I did.

God overrules everything, as we said a moment ago, that's his dominion, that's his sovereignty, that's how he relates to every unit in his own cosmos.

So, God's character, let's go back over this, love, which I subsumed a moment ago under goodness, and that's following the lead of biblical usage, you'll find in the Old Testament that the word good is used in all sorts of contexts that speak of God's kindness, God's benevolence, God's generosity, God's rescuing activity, saving activity.

[43 : 17] God is celebrated as good for bringing Israel out of Egypt. Yes, the word good is used much more widely actually than the word love is used in the New Testament.

love is so to speak collared, grabbed, and put to work for one overmastering purpose, namely, celebrating the reality of redemption and salvation, God rescuing us from the trouble into which sin has brought us, setting our feet on a rock, giving us a new life, a new relationship with himself, a new power for righteousness, a new hope of glory.

The word that's used for that, in Greek of course, which is the language in which it's all being expressed in the New Testament, the word is agape, you knew that, in Greek before the New Testament, before Christianity came along, agape simply meant contentment, but in Christianity the word is grabbed and redefined, agape means the divine love which redeems, the love which saves, the love which is merciful, the love which is recreative, and well, that range of meaning turns agape into a

Christian technical term at a stroke. There's another word actually in the New Testament which is treated in just about the same way, the word grace, it's charis in the Greek, prior to the coming of Christianity, charis, it's a Greek word, meant gracefulness, in our sense of gracefulness, gracefulness of ballet dancers and good horse riders and that kind of thing, but the Christian spokesmen, the apostles, grabbed it, redefined it, defined it in such a way, in fact, that its meaning paralleled that of agape.

Grace is God's loving goodwill, active in the process that we call blessing. God saves, God enriches, God renews, God gives joy, and it's all grace, gifts of grace.

[46 : 26] So, agape and charis are additions, shall I say, to the biblical vocabulary. There's no single word in the Old Testament that quite corresponds to either of them.

They are new words with new definitions needed in order to express the magnificence of the new thing, rescue and redemption, salvation, the life that, by God's love and grace, you and I are sharing even now as we think about these things.

things. So, there you have the center of the revelation of God's character in the gospel.

It's a character of love and mercy, unlimited, unqualified in terms of its intensity, love and grace will go as far as it's necessary to go in order to save the lost.

That's the New Testament perspective. So, we stand in awe of the love and grace of God. Here you've got something more wonderful than we can grasp.

[47 : 53] And, God's faithfulness to his word, his justice in maintaining righteousness in his world, his wisdom in ordering things, his all the aspects of the relationship into which he enters with us humans, all of that is sorry, yes, sentence suddenly fell apart, all of that is covered by grace and love used in the broad sense.

Okay, that's God's character, that's how God shows himself in character terms by his saving action. Alright, now we know how he behaves, how he exists, how he behaves. Ah, I can see that the clock is beating me and beating me badly, so I have trouble now.

I said that I was going to ask the question, how can God be both singular and plural? As he is, for the New Testament is very clear that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons in mutual relationship who constitute the one God by very virtue of that relationship.

God, in other words, is a society. God is, well, God has given names to the three persons, we follow out the names. God is the Father, that is, the source of planning and power, fulfilling purposes through his Son.

[50 : 00] The picture of Father and Son is the picture of a second person doing the will of the first person in order to please the first person.

Through the Son, God creates and through the Son, God redeems. and the work is actually executed by a third person, a third person exercising power directly, and on that account called the Spirit, or the Holy Spirit of God.

Spirit is a word which in the Hebrew, Ruach, points to divine energy let loose in different forms, in the form of wind.

That's one very basic dimension of Ruach in the Old Testament. And it's divine energy let loose that is being affirmed when we hear of the Spirit of the Lord in the course of descriptions of the acts of God.

Now, to speak straight to the question I put, how is God both singular and plural? Answer, we don't know. Nobody knows. The understanding of the togetherness of the three persons in the unity of the one God goes beyond what the created minds so that us human beings can grasp.

[51 : 44] But what we can be sure of is the reality of the three persons because in God's work of redemption saving us they become a team whose separate ministries are clearly distinguished and defined in the New Testament which talks in detail about how they cooperate in this saving work of God.

Father plans it all and he has sent the Son the Son has died on the cross to put away sin he has risen again and now in his risen glory by his Holy Spirit he unites sinners to himself the Spirit finds them spiritually dead that is totally unresponsive to God he brings them to life through uniting them to the Lord Jesus now the reality which they have to come to terms with and learn to live out is that Christ lives in them by the Holy Spirit and the only way of life that is natural for them now is life according to the pattern of the Lord Jesus as we discern that pattern through studying the Gospels Jesus on earth set the pattern of perfect living we are called to match that with the help of the Holy Spirit because God's plan for us so it turns out is that we should be perfected in the moral image of the Lord Jesus that is to say we should be remade as rational creatures whose instincts and behavior patterns and attitudes correspond to those of our Savior well that's the plan and for the fulfillment of the plan the three persons operate as a team and you know how a team plays you watch hockey on the telly the team operates as a team there are a number of separate persons deliberately working together as a team to accomplish the common goal which is the scoring of goals in the hockey precise sense yeah sure and if you read

Romans chapter 8 and Ephesians chapter 1 and other parts of the New Testament also well you find that the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit each have a part to play in the work of our salvation and Paul is spelling it out indeed he's interweaving the aspects or elements of the plan that each of the three persons fulfills as they say the Father plans does everything through the Son as his agent

and the Father and the Son together draw on the Holy Spirit as the hands-on member of the team hands-on person of the Godhead who actually makes it happen as I said you can picture this of profession in terms of a hockey team playing and think of the sort of commenting which the commentators do as on the screen we see the team playing the puck being passed from one to another and then the appropriate man shoots it in and so forth and then finally

I am going to say just a word about glory I am sorry that talking about God has hogged nearly the whole of my time but there's a lot to talk about when you try to define the word God in such a way that people speaking of God will know what you're talking about you may stand there I hope you'll be comfortable I'm going to take one or two more minutes this word glory it's a systematically ambiguous word which in both testaments signifies first God on display the glory that is that God shows us and then second it signifies praise to God for what he's shown us this is the glory that we give to

[57 : 28] God the two meanings of the word come together very neatly in our prayer book communion service holy holy holy we say Lord God almighty the whole earth is full of your glory glory we then say be to God on high the earth full of God's glory yes that's glory on display and then glory be to God that is our praise and adoration given to God for what he's shown us you can think it out in these terms here are a couple of words which which help to fix the thought in the mind God displays himself as creator and redeemer displays himself as praiseworthy and the proper response to that is to give him worthy praise glory well the systematic ambiguity is there it's permanent it doesn't change at all we just need to remember that we give glory to

God in response to the glory that God has shown to us the glory of his love and all the other qualities of his character glory of his power and all the aspects of that power as scripture makes them known so it's for us as we close and now I must close first of all to ask ourselves in honesty before the Lord do we think of our God our Heavenly Father our Saviour Holy Spirit in a way that is praiseworthy second do we give the Father the Son and the Spirit worthy praise for that praiseworthiness and thirdly in discussion do we test ideas about

God the world is full of them they keep being presented to us in discussion do we test ideas about God in terms of this criterion of whether they are praise worthy and should call forth from us worthy praise yes I have to finish suddenly because there is Olaf not quite standing but almost and he knows very well that I've gone a little bit over the hour and I apologize for that I am a man who finds it easier to start talking than to stop you have to put up with that brothers and sisters but I'm going to stop now glory to God alone amen to you have reason to be arising from the presentation so dr. packer if you were delivering a talk on the doctrine of God in the year 12 BC rather than 2012 AD what would be the main elements that would be missing from what you've given us this morning well the story of redemption would only be could only be half told in 12 BC because the fullness of redemption had to await the coming of Christ before it was revealed what I could have said is that God's being is as I've described it the fullness of God's being is already part of the Old Testament revelation and the character of God in outline at any rate is revealed already in his covenant relation with Israel which carries with it and I could say this on the basis of what's in the prophets it carries with it the hope eventually of a remade world in which there's no sin only order of a kind that brings glory to

God that you see is what the prophets predicted and somehow God is going to take his people from where they are at the moment and where they were in 12 BC was where they are actually in the New Testament Gospels that is under the thumb of Rome God is going to take his people from where they are at the moment to that final glory we don't yet know quite how if I've been really perceptive I would have been able to go on and say now one of the fascinating things about the affirmations of the covenant with Israel that God makes through the prophets and of the Psalms is that there are two figures corresponding in striking ways making their way through the prophets and through the Psalms and they are figures of one who is yet to be and we wait to see how these pictures of the two figures are going to be fulfilled there's the picture of the king there's going to be a descendant of David greater than David who will be God's agent for bringing the world into godly shape that's

[64 : 29] Old Testament prophecy and it's in the Psalms as well and then there's the suffering servant of Isaiah chapter 53 and the psalmist seems to be on the same wavelength in a number of the psalms and from Isaiah 53 it looks as if what the suffering servant does is directly directly responsible for the perfection that's going to be for God's covenant people the perfection towards

which he's leading them but how the two are going to fit together I wouldn't have been able to say because in BC 12 nobody knew nobody could see and it clearly wasn't God's time for putting the two figures together as elements in the profile of the

Son of God who was coming however as Jesus was born with angelic utterances surrounding his birth as Jesus grew to maturity and began to fulfill a teaching ministry in Palestine well it became increasingly obvious that the two figures are one figure and that the Lord Jesus himself is that figure and well the New Testament goes on from there so that's the short answer it isn't very short granted but you know when you get to trying to spell out what's in the Bible there's a lot to be said and there are the other short questions with more answers

Isabel it appears in the Old Testament where God changes his mind when you know more than in a desert begs him not to destroy obviously the labour house do you think there's an example for us of what could happen in our time I mean or you know these people have more protection these portugals directly it's hard to hear back here sorry here you don't want you don't want that shows for our time now do you think God will still change his mind or is it actually God changing his mind well I think that on the let me see four or five occasions when the Old Testament says that God changed his mind what is being affirmed is that as something on the human side changed so

God's response to it his reaction to it as we might say changed in a corresponding way but there's that the changes of mind are only a response to a human change of mind and at no point are God's changes of mind a new factor shall I say injected into the situation as part of a new creative purpose that God has formed and about which he hasn't yet told us and that the change of mind is not information about it change of mind is simply that God how can I say it well I have to say responds in a significantly different way when people have changed their attitude towards him does that make sense in modern theological discussion by the way within the last 10 15 years there has been an attempt to reconstruct a theology of God in terms of the principle that the change of mind that is God moving to new creative plans which he didn't have before the change of mind within the ongoing of human history this is integral to the nature of God kind of thing that he does and I believe that that's been a major mistake and nearly everybody else now agrees not quite everybody but most people I want to shy away from the use of the word God replace it with one of the Bible's somewhat extended metaphor most high deeply appeals to me apparently Greeks and Hebrews shared that metaphor when they overlap

[70 : 21] I increasingly find that helpful especially in our culture where religions overlap increasingly the word becomes without definition and I find it worrisome for that reason do you have any thoughts along those lines well I think I think that you're being realistic when you say that that's that that's a problem today the world is full of ways of talking about God which aren't Christian but are very vocal and which intrude into Christian talk about God in very confusing ways so if Christians if the church can stick to ways of talking about God that are distinctively Christian it will be gain all round yes we talk about the most high once upon a time

I think from the 17th through the 19th century you could mark the distinctiveness by using the name which people thought that God had given himself the name Jehovah and you could speak in sermons and so on about Jehovah planning to do this and actually accomplishing what he's planned and so on and so forth but now scholars know that Jehovah is most certainly not the way that the Jews pronounced the name of God and further that the Jews didn't like pronouncing the name that comes when you put vowels to four consonants in the way that produced the name Jehovah in the first instance so I don't think that we can do anything with Jehovah or Yahweh or whatever along that line if we

I can say if we can get used to something like talking about the most high God the creator whatever well it may well be gain in discussions and conversations with people who want to talk to us about God and who want to push inappropriate ideas about God into the conversation so what I'm saying Harvey is that I think that you put your finger on a real problem and I no more than anybody else have a fully fashioned ready made answer I don't I just like other people I just do the best I can in these conversations just as a footnote following up on what you just said isn't there something really profound about having a tetragrammaton which is not pronounced and every time you come to it you move off to the side and you say

I don't know well that's what the Jews did as a matter of fact nobody I think in the church today knows well nobody virtually nobody knows that Adonai is an Old Testament name for God though yes the Jews the Jews formed this habit and for all I know they still have they still practice it do they

okay but it's never become a Christian name for God I mean a name that Christians regularly use for God so if you were going to use it you'd have to stop and define it it isn't in our hymns our hymns are full of Jehovah's but they're not full of Adonai's it isn't in our prayer book it isn't in any part of the Christian heritage of prayer I mean any of the forms of prayer that have come down to us from the Christian past so you would be starting from cold I think if you tried to introduce it today and I'm not sure that the endeavour would be worth the energy but let everyone be fully persuaded in their own minds about that when you mentioned about God's control that he's all powerful etc then you I think you said that you can't know his guidance in the sense of control you know direct guidance except in retrospect but if he's all heartful and controlling for a Christian shouldn't you know his guidance going forward as well if you're asking for direction for your life on this this this oh yeah you're misunderstanding me and I'm sorry if I laid myself open to this understanding

[76 : 04] I wasn't thinking about guidance in that precise sense of well we know how it works we search the scriptures and we pray and our consciences incline towards a particular path of action which seems to us which God seems to be showing us is wisest most likely to be most fruitful in the situation personal guidance is a reality and I thank God for it and I celebrate it indeed I joined I'm a joined author of a book about it but no what I was talking what I was trying to talk about anyway was the fact that we are in no position to see in advance the things that God is going to do the specific things that

God is going to do the kind of anticipation of the future that the Bible gives us doesn't enable us to do that so that in each move shall I say forward in the sense in which we use the term forward each move forward in our own lives we have to think we have to search the scriptures we have to pray and we try each time to discern the best and wisest thing to do and sometimes often in fact doing it we find that yes God is blessing this and leading us along this path thank you Lord but often not always but often we find that we take these courses of action which we believe to be the wisest the best and indeed the rightest and circumstances seem at first and perhaps a long period circumstances seem to work against us so that we wonder whether we made the right decision after all we all of us

I'm sure have had experiences of both kinds and what we should say I think about the unrewarding experiences is well it doesn't mean that we didn't make the right decision it only means that God having brought us to make that decision as part of his plan for us has lessons for us to learn out of circumstances which we didn't anticipate and it's for us day by day and week by week to try and see what those lessons are and to learn them it's the kind of Jeremiah experience you know God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet I'm going to and he tells Jeremiah I'm going to protect you and it all sounds wonderful and then he says and you'll have a terrible time they'll constantly be against you you'll be in constant trouble so on and so forth

I'll I'll see that you keep going as long as I want you to keep going but don't expect an easy passage just because in broadest terms you know that I'm I've got my eye on you I'm happy lot to have to close the proceedings thank Dr.

Patrick for this presentation and for the participation and the questions