

Solus Christus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 February 2012

Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0 : 00] So, this is the title of our talk today, and next week the title of our talk is Philip and the eunuch and the Lord's Prayer.

So that's Harvey Guest is going to weave some magic there, we hope, on that particular subject. Of course, I dread announcing Dr. Packer, but one thing that I think is good to draw attention to, he talks about his arrival at St. John Shaughnessy, and he says immediately, Kit and I started a home Bible study, and an example soon followed by others.

So it sounds like the first Bible study at that time, when he first arrived in Shaughnessy. And he attempted a Sunday morning set-up for adult education, which is this group, which he says is still going strong.

So adult education is something that I wasn't converted until halfway through my life, but very soon realized the importance of adult education.

And in all its different forms, and this one here particularly appealed to me, the idea that we could tap the hearts and minds of the congregation, that they would share it in a forum like this.

[1 : 32] And that is a part of the philosophy of learnings exchange. And so we welcome you again, Dr. Packer, for Solus Christus, and good luck.

Have you got enough chairs? No. No. It's adjourned.

Well, you will not mind if I take my coat off, as others also sometimes do.

As you can imagine, brothers and sisters, I dread being introduced by Bill.

And the first thing I must say this morning is, thank you, Bill.

[2 : 43] It wasn't anything like as bad as I feared. Now, to business. My title, as Bill told you, is Solus Christus, which is Latin, of course.

It means Christ alone. That's what the word solus means, alone. And I'm speaking to order.

The committee was asked if we might have some talks at learners' exchange on some of the phrases which were big in Reformation theological discussion.

Solus Christus was one of them. Sometimes it appeared in the ablative, solo Christo, which is, in Latin, the instrumental case.

And solo Christo means by Christ alone. Christ being the instrumental means, you see, of whatever is being spoken of.

[3 : 54] In fact, as I shall tell you in about ten minutes, it is salvation. There were five of these phrases, including the word solus or sola, the ablative, that were big in 16th century Reformation discussion.

And they've come down to us as a group. Sola Scriptura, by Scripture alone. That's an answer to the question, how do we get knowledge of God?

Sola Fide, by Faith alone. Which is the answer to the question, how do we come into the salvation of God? Sola Gratia, by Grace alone.

Which is the answer to the question, what is the source of that salvation into which we come, by faith? And then, solo Christo, by Christ alone, as the means of our salvation.

The pioneer who opened the road, along which we travel, into and in salvation.

[5 : 15] And then, finally, a phrase which wasn't new in the 16th century at all. It had often been used, actually, by medieval theologians, long before the Reformation was a twinkle in anybody's eye.

That's the phrase, soli Deo Gloria, which means glory to God alone. And what these phrases between them purport to do, is to define, first of all, the proclamation of the Gospel.

Meaning, that is, the group of phrases expresses the claim that you haven't declared the full Gospel until you've done justice to all five.

So the phrases define the proclamation of the Gospel. They define, also, the reality of faithfulness to the Gospel.

For part of their message is that individual Christians, who are not, as it were, plugged in to the message of all these phrases, are not where they should be, in terms of being in the kingdom, in the life, and, as the New Testament so often says, in Christ.

[6 : 42] And, finally, one has to say, thinking back to the 16th century Reformation, these five phrases define the battlefield for the Gospel, where debate, and pretty intense debate, needed to take place, and did take place in the 16th century, and, I would suggest, although this isn't going to be a major point of my presentation, where it needs to take place today, in certain areas, where, oh, the mistaken ideas are wearing different clothing, but they are still offering us the same mistake.

I'll indicate what I mean by that a little bit later on. Here, let me simply say, as I begin to open up my topic, that the meaning of solus Christus is defined by reference to the other four phrases that go along with it.

that's the context of this phrase, and you're not likely to grasp its meaning properly, unless you are clear on the meaning of the other four phrases.

In other words, it's all or nothing, all five, or you're likely to be mistaken about the whole set. So, we are going to pick up our presentation, or my presentation, in the 16th century, when Reformation theology was articulating itself against very heavy criticism from the unreformed Catholic side, in Reformation theology as spelled out by Luther and by Calvin, and by a whole string, well, whole string, half a dozen, perhaps, I'd better say, half a dozen really outstanding theologians who were on the Reformation side at this time, in all these versions of Reformation theology, the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ in both the Christian message and the Christian life was being highlighted right from the start.

And part of the accusation served by the Reformers against unreformed Catholicism is that in the Catholic Church at that time, Christ simply was not being given the central place and the central significance that is properly His.

[9 : 58] The Reformers, in other words, insisted, first of all, on the divine identity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the Son of God, a phrase which means, in fact, that He is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. He is divine and to be worshipped just as the Father and the Holy Spirit are.

And in His incarnate life, He is the source first of revelation of God.

the Father is fully revealed in the Son. And second, He is the source of, the full source of redemption from God.

Redemption being a picture word, a biblical picture word, that means deliverance from a state of misery, captivity, frustration, and you can use other words that carry that same meaning.

[11 : 18] Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. He brings us redemption from that condition which is the natural condition in which all of us find ourselves.

And He brings us redemption first of all by achieving for us reconciliation with the Father on the cross.

We are all of us guilty, out of step, and out of touch with God the Father. And through the cross where Christ bore our sins in our place, reconciliation is achieved.

Of course, the New Testament, Paul in particular, is very strong on that. And that isn't the whole of the story. Redemption means reconciliation to God, yes, indeed it does, and it also means resurrection with Christ in His resurrection.

He, the Savior, who died for sin, rose from the dead, now reigns triumphant with the Father's right hand, and Christians are alive in Him.

[12 : 39] There's a lot in the New Testament celebrating that. Well, the Reformation theology stressed all of these matters in a way that none of them had been stressed in the Catholic theology that preceded the 16th century.

and in reformational Christianity, that is, the Christian life, as the Reformers understood it, well, the sufficiency of Christ as Savior, as Messiah, so that there's no need for any other mechanism for salvation, to stand alongside Him.

That sufficiency is stressed. The uniqueness of the Lord Jesus as our mediator, the one who links us with the Father, whom we're out of touch with, remember, when we start, that also is stressed, and the personal relation with Christ by faith, that is, by personal trust and commitment, that also is

stressed as being the essence of real religion, so said the Reformers, and if that isn't part of your piety, well, your piety is hollow, you are not yet in salvation, whatever you will think, you do need to move from where you are into a real relationship with Christ, something which the church, the unreformed church, won't encourage you to do as you need to do it, something in which you have to reject the complacency about you which the unreformed church entertains, thinking, you see, that you are in a state of grace, you have to acknowledge that you aren't, and you need to enter into a personal relationship with the risen

Jesus Christ, who is present with us by his Holy Spirit, in order to come into the reality of salvation, new life, and fellowship with Christ for the salvation that he brings.

So, according to the reformers, *solus Christus* is a tag phrase which expresses the central theme, central reality of Christianity.

[15 : 50] What is Christianity about? We ask, and the New Testament comes straight back and tells us with unambiguous clarity on page after page after page, Christianity is about salvation.

we have to acknowledge that we need salvation, and I was speaking of that a moment ago, and then learn to recognize the Lord Jesus as our Savior, which means our rescuer from the state of lostness in which he finds us, and, now this is where the reformers counterattack began, you have to realize that the reformers, that anyone who isn't trusting Christ as Savior, and mediator, and putting all their hope of salvation in him, is actually, in one way or another, on the false path, the path, that is, of self-salvation, which in truth doesn't lead anywhere, though all of us, because of the twist in our thinking that sin has brought, we believe naturally that it does.

Self-salvation, that is, working for eternal life, working for the ideal condition in which you want to find yourself, that's the natural religion of fallen men, and the path to self-salvation, in some form, is what everybody who isn't actually trusting Christ is trying to follow.

those who trust Christ for salvation are learning the path of dependence on the Savior, and on the grace of a loving God.

Those who are trying to find a path of self-salvation, they are pursuing the will-of-the-wisp, that's what it really is, but fantasy, the fantasy, the hope, the vision of independence of God.

[18 : 30] Because that goes right back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve wanted to be independent of God, and make their own way into happiness, making their own decisions, and no longer subjecting themselves to the leadership and goodness of God.

that's what Genesis 3 tells us, is the truth about human fallenness, and we, all of us, inherit the Adamic syndrome, shall I say, which means the instinct for independence of God as the way that leads to, however, we can see the happiness at which we're aiming.

So it was in the first century, so it was in the first century A.D., when the gospel was being preached by the apostles, so it was in the 16th century, when the Reformation conflict took place, so it is in the 21st century, as we try to spread the gospel in the western world today.

Well, in the world today. And, so the Lord Jesus Christ, uniquely, is the focus of real Christianity. Christianity. The gospels, actually, they're sometimes shrugged off by people who don't appreciate the stunning mastering of the task that the evangelists have set themselves, which you see in the four gospels as finished pieces of work.

[20 : 33] They're, as far as possible, from being artless, casual, disorderly memoirs of Jesus.

They are presentations of Jesus through the selection of his works and words, and finally the story of his death and resurrection.

presentation of him, which, if taken to heart, will show you the path to the foot of the cross and to the feet of the king.

You have that, actually, in quite a number of the stories in the gospels, although it's never highlighted at length, just a touch here and there.

But, just think for a moment, the Jesus of the gospels, who is our Jesus, our Savior and our Lord, makes a personal impact on people, of a kind that no human being, no other human being has ever made.

[21 : 58] It's an impact which has a double awareness in it. There is, on the one hand, a sense that there's something uncanny about this man, because he seems to be more than man.

And that prompted people, from time to time, in the days of his flesh, to step back from him, because he upset them.

And they kept their distance from him. One thinks, for instance, of how, in Luke chapter four, one reads how Jesus troubled the congregation in the synagogue, by saying, today, this prophecy from Isaiah about the preaching of peace, and new life is fulfilled in your ears.

Do remember, though, in the days of Elijah, God's mercy didn't come to Israel, it came to a widow, outside the Israelite fellowship.

And they were upset of that. What Jesus was telling them is, now, don't pat yourselves on the back as if you're God's favour. It's you aren't. The gospel has come to you, that's pure mercy.

[23 : 34] But don't imagine that you're special in the sense of a deserving cause. You are not. Well, he riled them, and they took him out of the synagogue, and they took him to a cliff, and they were going to push him down.

But then, Luke just quietly says, but he went through, going through the midst of them, he went his way. In other words, when push came to shove, the sense of his uncanniness led them to step back, and Jesus walked out of their company.

Well, that's one side of it, and you remember that when the crowd, the gang, that Judas and high priests and so on, were bringing to arrest Jesus, when he spoke directly to them, they went back and fell on the ground.

Remember John chapter 18? There was another moment when the sense that this man is more than man. What more is he? And the impulse to step back and, well, adopt the posture of worship, just for a moment, that came over them, and so that's what they did.

Well, that's one aspect of the reality of the incarnate Son of God, which, as the Gospels don't make a great deal of song and dance about, but it's there in the stories, just as the instinct to adore this person, to adore him and the way that you adore God.

[25 : 31] That, too, came over people, people who had contact with Jesus in the days of his flesh, and every now and then, they stepped forward rather than stepped back and made gestures of worship.

worship. And here, I think of Mary, when she met Jesus after his resurrection, and you remember, John chapter 20, and it's verse 17, in fact, he says to her, don't hold on to me, don't cling to me, is how the ESV puts it.

I think that hold on to me would have been an even better translation. What he's doing is discouraging her from what she is doing, and this is a bit of the culture, which is a known fact, and it explains, I think, what she was doing.

If you wanted to pay homage to somebody in that first century Greco-Roman world, what you did was knelt before them, and you grasped them round the knees.

And that, pretty certainly, is what Mary was beginning to do. Jesus says, don't do it. And the reason for saying that, what he goes on to say, for I've not yet ascended to my father, but I'm going to ascend very shortly, but what I want you to do is go and give my message to my disciples, and so forth.

[27 : 16] Well, there it is. A sense of the uncanniness of Jesus, a sense that Jesus is to be adored.

They haven't got words at that time for the thought that Jesus was both man and God. But they had quite clearly, every now and then, a tense, that incredible as it might seem, that's how it was.

And they reacted accordingly. Well, there's Solus Christus, Christ alone, as the focus of real Christianity back in the New Testament days, and Solus Christus, as the theme and the focus of Christianity must be there today, as the reformers insisted, that it must be there in the church of the 16th century, the church they were trying to reform.

Well, I say these things to introduce the theme of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, as the all-sufficient saviour and glorified king, which is how, finally, the New Testament presents him to us. And, having said those things in general terms, I am now going to discuss briefly three themes which, between them, I think, give us a sense of the significance of Solus Christus as a tag, a gospel tag, of wisdom and truth and life for us today.

[29 : 27] And, I'll tell you how I came to this. I was remembering the Roman steps. You folk probably don't know the Roman steps.

They lead up the side of a second order mountain in central Wales, one of the Rhino groups. Anybody ever climb the Rhino monks?

No, I thought he wouldn't know them. They're called the Roman steps because, in actual fact, they are a set of steps with stone steps where the track has been marked out by laying the stones.

Pretty certainly, it was a monastic track for monks wishing to cross the mountain. And, well, now they are one of the, what can I say, one of the sites, one of the ornaments of the place. One climbs the Roman steps, and I remember climbing the Roman steps for the first time. you go up and up, steps appear to lead into a blank wall of rock.

[30 : 47] The wall is, oh, 20 or 30 feet above you, and as you come close to it, it does appear absolutely solid, as if the steps are going to lead you up to a blank place of rock, and deposit you there.

But, no, when you get right up to the rock face, you find that there is a side, what do I call it, alley is the only word that comes to mind, side alley, you go round a hunk of rock, which, from further away, you couldn't distinguish from the rest of the rock, but you go around it, and then suddenly you find yourself on a little plateau, I don't know, ten feet in every direction, I suppose, let's do that in meters, three meters in every direction, it's a small, small plateau, but it has a terrific view, and I remember the first day that I climbed the Roman steps, went through the rock face in this way, by the alley, and suddenly found myself confronted, under a bright blue sky, sun shining, with this terrific view, and, well, there were three things that impressed me, there was the near view, the view of the landscape into which the path that I'd followed, the Roman steps path ran down, you could see the path going down for about a mile, actually, it was very impressive, and then there was the further view, because you could see for miles, you've got the big landscape behind the near landscape, and then you've got the sky, wonderful blue sky, sun shining, and on the horizon, there were some clouds, but when you looked up, well, it was just blue sky, it was a view which impressed itself very deeply on me,

I think of it now, and I can still see it, and there are now three points, three themes, that I want to discuss with you, first corresponding to Christ and the goal of God, or the plan of God, that's the close, close circle of thought and response to the message of the New Testament, and I might talk for a minute or two about Christ and the world of faiths, as you know, this is an era in the world's history when everybody is very interested in the number of religions that the world offers, and in bringing them together, and comparing them, and trying to synthesize them, and so on, and so forth, well, that's the further, that corresponds to the further view, the larger landscape, out beyond the close circle of vision, and then a theme that corresponds to looking up and glorying in the bright blue of the sky, and that's the theme of Christ and the praise of

God, and by looking at these three themes in succession, and briefly in each case, I hope that our sense of the uniqueness and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ will be enhanced.

Now let's see how we get on. first now, Christ and the goal of God, the goal that's expressed in the plan of God, the purpose that God is working through in the world that he's made.

[35 : 24] This actually is being presented to us just about everywhere in the New Testament, all the documents of the New Testament, Gospels, Epistles, and the Book of Revelation, which is a kind of literature that we don't produce nowadays.

We do produce imaginative stories, which illustrate and celebrate Christian themes.

Think of Lewis's Narnia books, for instance, Well, we have Narnia, and the Bible gives us the Book of the Revelation, which, in the first century situation, was, as I say, a literary genre, type of writing, with which they were quite familiar with its enormously complex symbolic idiom, which we find it so hard to live with, because we just don't talk and think in those ways today.

But, however, all these documents, they're pastoral documents, and they're offering us a pastoral presentation, of what? well of the purpose and plan and goal of God.

Here again, allow me to reminisce, on the Saturday, eight days before the Sunday, on which the Lord Jesus broke into my life, back in Oxford, in 1944, when I was 18, I heard an exposition of Colossians, chapter 1, in the course of which the expositor raised the question, what is God's purpose in the whole economy of grace?

[37 : 44] What is it that he wants? What is he after? The usual answer to that question, as I expect you know, is, well, God wants a people.

God wants a family. God wants a company of folk who will think of themselves as his in a special sense, and he will think of them as his in a special sense, and the relation between them will thus become a covenant relation.

The essence of the covenant relationship is personal pronouns, the human illustration which makes this clear is marriage, and what each party in the covenant is saying to the other party is, you are mine and I am yours.

God wants a covenant people, we say. this is the family, the new family, that he's generating in and through Christ.

But the guy doing the exposition answered the question in a different way, which has stuck with me again. I can hear him saying it still.

[39 : 15] What does God want, he asked, and his answer, more of his son, more of his son.

It takes a moment's thought to realize what's being said there, but now, in the New Testament, in the letters of Paul in particular, union with Christ is fundamental to the exposition of salvation.

It is in Christ, when one is united to him by faith, that we have our reconciliation, and we have our justification, and we have our adoption, and we have our hope of glory.

Union with Christ is the frame within which all of those realities become ours, and communion with Christ is the condition of life into which salvation brings us, and it starts and never stops.

We live in fellowship with Christ, yes, and we pray to him as we pray to the Father, and every now and then, through the scriptures, and perhaps through our conscience, we are made aware that Christ, our Savior, and our Lord is impressing something on us, to guide and encourage us in our life with him.

[40 : 55] He animates us by his Holy Spirit, from that standpoint, he is our life, in Colossians chapter 3, verse 4, you get the phrase, Christ is our life, just like that, and to crown the series of concepts which belong together to explain what it means for God to have more of his son, namely, in the form of you and me.

Irreverent, I suppose, to think of this as the cherry on top of the ice cream, but the fourth reality here is transformation. The Holy Spirit who indwells us as the gift of Christ to sanctify us, the Holy Spirit working from the inside out is changing our pattern of thought and of desire so that we become more and more like the Lord Jesus, in moral and spiritual terms.

And there's a great deal actually in the New Testament about that and the way that it proceeds.

Ephesians is particularly strong in it.

I haven't got time to take you through all the material in Ephesians that speaks of it, but just take my word for it, there is a lot.

And this is life in Christ transforming life in Christ, or life in Christ transforming us, perhaps that's the clearer way to say it, which is the process, the divine action that gives the Father what he wants, more of his Son, in you and me.

[43 : 07] Get the idea? Well, that's what God's goal is. It isn't very often said, I don't think, or thought in those terms, but these terms, it seems to me, get us right to the heart of what salvation is all about.

It's God reclaiming us fallen sinners who morally and spiritually have just become as ugly as Satan himself. And God, through Christ, in Christ, by the ministry of Christ, renews and restores us, so that in place of that ugliness, there is moral and spiritual beauty increasingly being created within us, as God does his work of securing for himself more of his son.

Now I must rush on. Second thought, second topic, looking at the further expanse now, Christ of the world of faiths.

here I can only say one thing, namely, that there are three sorts of faith in this world, three sorts of religion.

There is, of course, Christianity itself, a saving religion, a pure religion, a true religion, a Christ centered religion, and then outside that there is, first of all, what I call the natural religions, all of which are based on what theologians call general revelation, that is to say, the action of God, which scripture says quite a bit, the action of God generating and sustaining an awareness of himself as the standard of righteousness and the judge, ultimately, of everyone's track record.

[45 : 39] This is general revelation, which gives us natural religions, religions, that in one way or another pick up some, at least, of this natural religion raw material.

Lewis, C.S. Lewis, is the writer who helps me most on this. he points to Hinduism and his offshoots as the purest, that is to say, the fullest version of a sense of God or a sense of the divine, multi-form, of course, in Hinduism, a sense of the divine that you can't escape and mustn't try to escape.

That's, that's, I'm going to say, the inner reality of Hinduism, all its modes. And, with that goes a sense, which is, which turns out to be universal to the human race, a sense that we are called, we are bound, we are required, by the very nature of our existence in this world, to behave decently to

other people.

He calls that the tale, he writes about it in some detail in his academic lectures, very compressed as they are, titled day.