

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #9, November 6, 2005

CHRIST ALONE (*Solus Christus*)

The Cambridge Declaration includes a thesis statement about Jesus Christ, and specifically about this fourth of the five “solas” of Reformed Theology: *Solus Christus*, or **Christ Alone**. It states “We *reaffirm* that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical *Christ alone*. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement *alone* are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father. We *deny* that the gospel is preached if Christ’s substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and His work is not solicited.”

While it is hard to make any one of these great “sola” statements more important than another, we have come to one that is certainly central and essential to all five and indeed the whole of God’s revelation in His Scriptures. Without the teaching or doctrine of Christ, we have no faith at all. **Without Christ, there can be no Christianity!** (You would just have “ianity”, which is worse than insanity!) More specifically, without Christ there can be no salvation, no access to God or heaven!

The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 includes a chapter on Christ the Mediator. The first statement therein says, “To give effect to His eternal purpose God chose and ordained the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, in accordance with the covenant into which they had entered, to be **the mediator between God and man**; also to be the **prophet, priest, king, head and saviour** of the world.”

In the last (10th) statement of that chapter, it further explains “Christ’s threefold offices are necessary for us. **Because of our ignorance we stand in need of His prophetic office**; because of **our estrangement from God and the imperfection of our services at their best, we need His priestly office** to reconcile us to God and render us acceptable to Him; because **we have turned away from God and are utterly unable to return to Him, and also because we need to be rescued and rendered secure** from our spiritual adversaries, **we need His kingly office** to convince, subdue, draw, sustain, deliver, and preserve us, until we finally enter His heavenly kingdom.”

What we consider is part of theology called “**Christology**.” This is derived from the two Greek words *Christos* meaning “anointed one” or “messiah” and *logos* meaning “word, concept, or thought.” So Christology is **simply the study of the Christ**, Jesus, the Son of God, Messiah and Anointed One.

So certainly, this is a most serious and important truth to consider. Our approach to it could be any one of many, as “from Him and through Him and to Him are *all things*.” So how can we even narrow the subject down enough to even begin to address it?

Let’s first consider **how most of the world approaches this whole issue** and the Person of Christ Himself. In fact, if they are honest, *most* of the world has this same approach and belief, even in “Christian America!”

It might be illustrated by this exchange between the TV talkshow host, Phil Donahue, Dr. Albert Mohler (President of Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, and Rabbi Shmuley Boteach (author of “Judaism for Everyone”).

(Read excerpt of Donahue Show transcript.)

- **Is Jesus Christ the only way to God? Is Christ alone the way to God and heaven?**

Before we answer, let's be sure we understand the question. Is it possible for non-Christians or someone who has no trust in Jesus Christ to go to heaven when they die?

In the example provided by Phil Donahue, **what about a “good” sincere practicing Jew?** Someone who was born into a Jewish family, raised by Jewish parents, always taught only the Jewish religion, never had an opportunity to hear the gospel about Jesus, never heard the gospel call and never rejected it. He lived a “good” life, always endeavored to obey God's law as taught him by the Jewish religion, suffered for his faith and race, and finally put to death as an innocent victim of the Nazi hatred of the Jews. Is it fair that he would die at the hands of a God hating and Jew hating Nazi and go to hell for eternity, when he did not chose his parents, he did not have a choice about being raised in the Jewish faith, he lived a good life of obedience to the Jewish religion, he never said or did anything unkind or uncaring to anyone, he never heard the good news about Jesus, and he never rejected its call.

Is it fair for him to have no other option, no second chance after he dies, no hope of any relief from an eternity of torment? **And yet, the Nazi** who killed him, lived an evil sinful life, hated God and all men, murdered thousands with no remorse, and then heard the gospel and gave his life to Christ just before he dies. He **goes to heaven** for an eternity of joy with God, while the Jew suffers forever in hell???

In fact, a prominent pastor, national Bible teacher with a doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary, who is even a featured speaker for the conservative National Religious Broadcasters, (Anthony Evans) wrote a book (*Totally Saved*) about salvation with the comment **“God...would not be just if He held people accountable for that which they cannot do, and for knowledge they do not possess.”** Doesn't this apply to the hypothetical Jew in the above illustration? This same author went on to say **“People no longer go to hell because of what Adam did.” “They go to hell for what they do. God took care of Adam's sin on the cross. He paid for original sin.”** According to this author, only one sin is actually damnable, namely a deliberate, conscious rejection of God's revealed truth, ... a rejection of the gospel and way of salvation. He further writes **“The only thing God will not tolerate is people who willingly suppress His truth and reject His salvation.”** He explains his position that people can be saved apart from the gospel of Christ that **“The premise is this: God's invitation to all people to respond in faith assumes that those who have been invited have the capacity to respond. To put it another way, God's command to**

believe is only applicable to those who can heed it.” He goes on to assert that some of those who have no access to the gospel are earnestly seeking God and that He is obliged to save them apart from the gospel. He writes **“When it comes to salvation, God always makes a way for those who seek Him.”** He cites Scripture as support for this position:

Jeremiah 29:13 (NASB) 'And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (actually a promise to Israel of the access in prayer to God while in exile in Babylon)

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB) And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (for believers, the proper perspective and approach to living by faith)

He even says that **“A person can be saved without knowing Jesus’ name, but not without Jesus’ provision for sin.”**

And yet **this teaching is commonplace in many churches**, even many conservative evangelical churches that claim to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. Have we not all heard it taught that God holds us responsible only for the truth we have received. That, for us who have heard the gospel about Jesus, we must accept or reject Him; but for those “innocent” people who have not heard, God must have another plan. It would not be fair for God to send them to hell without somehow giving them a fair chance, another option. This position not only answers the question about the good and sincere Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, etc., but also solves the problem of the innocent heathen, the American Indians before the white men came, the lost tribes in the remote parts of the world or others who have never heard the good news about Jesus. So it lets us feel good about **God’s “fairness”** and comfortable about the people in such categories.

- But what does God say about this issue? **What is the Scriptural position?**
 1. **Is there more than “one way”** or another by whom we might be saved?

Ephes. 2:12 (NASB) remember that you were at that time **separate from Christ**, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God** in the world.

John 3:36 (NASB) "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he **who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.**"

John 8:24 (NASB) "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for **unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.**"

John 14:6 (NASB) Jesus said to him, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.**

Acts 4:12 (NASB) "And there is **salvation in no one else; for there is no other name** under heaven that has been given among men, **by which we must be saved.**"

2. What does God say **about the certainty of this salvation in Christ alone**? Is there any chance of it not happening, any factor it depends upon? Is it "effectual" or "possible?" Does it depend upon us or is there any chance of it being irrevocable, undone or not being permanent?

Romans 8:30 (NASB) and whom He predestined, these He also called; and **whom He called, these He also justified**; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

John 6:37 (NASB) "**All** that the Father gives Me **shall come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me **I will certainly not cast out.**"

Rev. 3:5 (NASB) **'He who overcomes** shall thus be clothed in white garments; and **I will not erase his name** from the book of life, (as city officials often did then with undesirable citizens) and **I will confess his name before My Father**, and before His angels.

1 John 5:5 (NASB) And who is the one who overcomes the world, but **he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**

John 10:27-28 (NASB) "**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; [28] and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.**"

2 Thes. 2:13-14 (NASB) But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. [14] And it was for this **He called you through our gospel**, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. What about those **who understand something of God in His natural revelation** of creation, or **who earnestly "seek"** God, or those **"good" people** who just have never heard about Christ? Does He make a way for any of them?

Romans 3:11-12 (NASB) There is **none who understands**, There is **none who seeks for God**; [12] All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is **none who does good**, There is **not even one.**"

- Besides, no one can even respond without being enabled by God. (Because we are dead in our trespasses and sins.)

John 6:44 (NASB) "**No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:65 (NASB) And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father.**"

- Besides, consider these additional points that refute this position:
4. IF it were true that sinners could be saved by some other means or without knowledge of Jesus Christ, and that God held them in innocence until He allowed them that opportunity, then the best thing for Christians would be to keep the gospel to ourselves. If we tell them about Jesus, then they are responsible and damned. Yet we are commanded to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (Mark 16:15) If it were true that men are held in innocence until they know and understand the gospel truth (remember that the gospel is a stumbling block to some and foolishness to the rest of the world), then the missionary and evangelism efforts of the church are cruel acts that are sending millions to hell!
 5. Adam and Eve prove that no one can ever come to God through natural revelation, or even through being "good" or "innocent" or "close" to God. They had perfect minds in a perfect creation for hundreds of years, and yet God had to speak to them and give them specific instructions. They also walked in close fellowship with God and were innocent of all sin except one, and yet God had to visibly and audibly present the gospel (in the *protoevangelium* of Gen. 3:15, which even then was based upon Christ alone) for them to be saved.
 6. Romans 1 teaches that the actual outcome of natural revelation (inside by conscience and outside by creation) is always insufficient to bring man to salvation (and actually only brings condemnation), and that mankind is so depraved that we cannot discover God in nature (and actually suppress the truth in unrighteousness). Man can only become more depraved, more condemned, invent more false religion and idols of creation, and become fools from natural revelation. Natural revelation is to leave us without excuse, and (when enabled by God's Spirit) convict our consciences and reveal His nature.
 7. 1 Corinthians 1 teaches that the gospel is a stumbling block to many and foolishness to the rest of the world. It not only takes special Divine revelation to be saved, but it depends upon the Spirit of God to be understood and applied. 1 Corinthians 2 adds that no one knows the things of God but God, and that He must reveal them to us by His Spirit. As James 3:15 teaches, any "wisdom" of the world does not come from God above, but is actually from demons!
 8. **Actually, there is another way of salvation and access to heaven!** Jesus in Matthew 19:16-26 had an encounter with a rich young man. He first pointed out the fact that there is only One who is good. But since the young man did not believe him, (and thought himself to be good), He went on to illustrate another "way" for him to be saved and gain eternal life. He just simply had to perfectly obey every commandment all his life and never sin! This is presented as

“possible” but harder than pressing a 1500 pound camel through the eye of a sewing needle! So, we are more confirmed that Jesus is the only way, when we see what is necessary for fellowship and access to a perfect and holy God. We must be perfect and holy as He is, and that is **impossible** for us to do ourselves.

- So the **conclusion** must be that man **cannot be saved apart from Christ alone!** The special and Divine revelation that is found in the Word and the His word is the only true “good news” that can save and keep saved!
- **What about you?** Are you trusting in anything other than Jesus Christ for your salvation and access to God? If you think about it, there are really only **two religions** in the world: **human attempts** and **Divine accomplishment**. Anything other than trusting in **Christ alone** for your salvation is really depending on your own efforts, goodness or actions to save yourself. We must cling to Christ alone, abandoning everything else. (I have told many that if He is not the only way, then I will spend eternity in hell, as I have no other hope!) What about you? Pray about what are you really trusting in for your salvation? (Jesus plus family, church, decision, baptism, living a good life, etc.) Do you really have a living growing and real relationship with God through Jesus Christ alone? If you sense God convicting you of your need for only Him, if you sense God calling you to Himself, if you sense an understanding of the good news of His gospel that you have never had before, that is not from yourself – it is the grace and mercy of God in your life. Respond to Him, believe in Him, trust in Him alone, and He will save you securely forever!
- **But what about us? As Christians,** what is the meaning of Christ alone for us *after salvation*?
 1. **First,** we must **be sure we know the historical Christ of the Bible**. Many false views of the Person of Christ have been embraced by many ever since He came. For example, some heresies since the first century include:

Arianism treated Jesus Christ as the supreme of God’s creatures, and denied His Divine status; making Him created and not equal to God.

Docetism treated Christ as a purely Divine being Who only had the “appearance” of being human; denying His human nature.

Ebionism treated Christ as a purely human figure who had special gifts from God; denying His Divine nature.

Even today, most problems in “Christian” religions relate to an inaccurate view of Christ and His work. What are some examples?

2. **Second,** we must **be sure that we embrace the true Christ and Him alone!**

Paul F. M. Zahl said “The prism through which all light concerning God is reflected is Jesus Christ. This means that *Christology* is the beginning and the end, better, the

starting point and summary of all Christian thought. Christology is the subject of theology.” Jesus Christ is our “all in all” (1Cor. 15:28)

We must come to the point that we realize that **Christ is** the issue of every debate, the solution to every problem, the source of every need, the peace that overcomes the world, the hope that never fails, the faith that overcomes all, the love that makes us like God, the way through any challenge, the truth that overcomes any error and sets us free, the life that overcomes any deadness, and the glory that enables us to enjoy God forever. Such also frees us and enables us to be used for real ministry to others. How does this work itself out practically?

- Example of our conversation with some Christian people about homosexuals that are friends of theirs and claim to be Christians. I focused on refuting their claims and “hammering” them with the truths of Leviticus 19, Romans 1, etc.. Debbie however calmly said that they should keep Christ the issue – share Him and make Him the issue, *not* their homosexuality. No one can deal with any issue (morality, politics, family, relationships, etc.) until they “deal” with the Christ of the Bible! **He is the ultimate issue** behind every other one!

Ephesians 2:6 says we are already “**raised up with Him and seated with Him** in the heavenly places.” Colossians 3:1-3 explains further, “*Since* you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind on the things above**, not on the things that are on earth. For **you have died and your life is hidden with Christ** in God.”

This **does not mean** that we are to become irrelevant mystics who have no use for this world (“too heavenly minded to be any earthly good”). But most Christians are so worldly in their view of Christ and His relationship to them, that they are no different from the world or its unbelievers. Rather it means that we are oriented in our outlook **toward God** rather than humanity (*including ourselves*), the **eternal** rather than this present age, **holiness** rather than happiness, **glorifying God** rather than demanding that God meet our felt needs. Only this kind of orientation will make us “salt” and “light” in the world, becoming a distinctive testimony to Christ as we are conformed to His image and made into “imprints” (Titus 2:7) or examples for others.

If we have Christ, then what else do we want or need? When we can come to the place that we realize that the one who has Christ plus nothing else is just as rich as the one who has Christ plus everything, then we can really live as He intended.

Perhaps this is the issue of the **Reformation** that was not emphasized enough? In the struggles to regain truth in the church, the Reformers rightly focused upon the essential truths of Scripture alone (as the sole authority), faith alone (as the sole means by which God makes us righteous and justified), and grace alone (as the sole basis for our justification and sanctification). They rightly re-established **systemization** of these Biblical truths. But the danger of systemization is that we can drift into *systems of truth*

being the focus, instead of a **Person of Truth** being the focus! The Bible is a systematic revelation of truth, but more importantly, it is a record and revelation of the **Living Word of Truth – Jesus Christ!**

Christ Alone sums up Christianity and the entire faith! This by no means detracts from the fullness of God – orthodox Biblical Trinitarianism – it simply means that Jesus Christ is the central figure and Mediator of God's dealings with man. His work involves all aspects of the Christian's life (the Christian quadrilateral): **history, doctrine, experience, and community**. We cannot take away any one of these and still have Christianity.

- But what can happen if we get too focused on any one of these aspects and forget the One Who defines what they should be and makes them all relevant?

Scholastic people can get sucked into a historically centered faith. Thinking people can get sucked into a doctrinally centered faith. Emotional people can get sucked into an experience centered faith. Relational people can get sucked into a community centered faith. *But they (individually) are not the foundation of our faith, and any of them out of balance upsets the foundation of our faith!* **Jesus Christ is the (chief) cornerstone and foundation of our faith!**

2 Cor. 4:6 (NASB) For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give **the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

The same creative almighty God who created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), is the One Who has created light out darkness in our hearts (souls) to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ alone! As we behold the face and beauty of Christ, we behold and come to understand the glory (essence of Who He is) of God Himself!