

Nov. 19, 2017

Soli Deo Gloria

Various Scriptures

What is most needed in the faltering modern church is not more clever strategies and flashy programs but the restoration of an exalted view of God.

LTS: Psa. 96

Intro:

I am persuaded that what made the Protestant Reformation so enormously powerful and fruitful was its exalted vision of the supremacy of God. It was never Luther's ambition to change the world or even divide the church. Nothing like that was on his mind. He simply wanted relief from the personal guilt and sure condemnation he expected to receive from an angry and Almighty God. He found that relief in his study of the Scriptures when he rediscovered, in Paul's letter to the Romans, the gospel of justification by faith alone. But Luther could never have anticipated how this doctrine would hit the world like a comet colliding with the earth!

Yes, Luther found the forgiveness he was looking for, but the gospel is only penultimately about the forgiveness of sins. It is ultimately about the glory of God. When the gospel exploded upon the scene in medieval Europe, the spiritual blast radius reached to the furthest corners of the globe as millions upon millions of people discovered the glory of God as God Himself had revealed it in His word and in His world.

This morning I want to talk with you about the last of the five slogans of the Reformation. So far we have discussed the Bible's teaching on justification is by Sola Gratia (Grace alone), through Sola Fide (Faith alone), in Solus Christus (Christ alone), as revealed in Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone).

The final and highest "Sola" of the Reformation is Soli Deo Gloria (For the glory of God Alone).

I want to suggest to you that just as the power of the Reformation Church in Medieval times was owing to the rediscover of the glory of God, so the weakness of the modern church is owing to a greatly diminished view of the glory of God.

Never in the history of American Christianity has the church been so weak and ineffective. And frankly, I believe the problem is that we have become so self-centered. Our religion tends to be about Jesus and Me, the Bible and Me. Baptism is now about me, the Lord's table is about Me. Christian music on the radio is almost always about Me. Church is about Me! Salvation is about Me. Even the fact that God sent His only begotten Son to die on a Roman cross has been reoriented in such a way that it is all about Me!

Michael Horton weighed in on this subject years ago when he wrote, Often our worship services are attempts at entertainment rather than worship. When the preaching centers on our own happiness rather than the attributes and achievements of God, we attend church to passively enjoy and receive from the professionals - the preacher, the choir, the soloist, the occasional drama troupe. But I believe this way of coming to public worship is indicative of human centered theological orientation.

If Jesus Christ entered at the back of our church on Sunday morning, would we all clap our hands and dance and sing, "Happy Days Are Here Again"? Would we show Him our "God is rad, he's my dad" sweatshirt? Or would the room be suddenly filled with awe-stricken silence?...

What we believe about God and salvation ultimately determines the object, focus, fervor, and direction of our worship. If we really rediscovered the biblical portrait of God, we would not need entertainment gimmicks; enthusiasm would not be artificially generated. And because our minds would be connected to it all, there would be a lasting impact even when we are not surrounded by choirs, musicians, and a cast of players.¹

After Luther rediscovered the gospel, he and the other Reformers began following the myriad of gospel threads that traced to every page of the Bible. And as they let Scripture form their theology, what emerged was a radically transformative vision of the glory of God.

I have four main points this morning, and in the interest of full disclosure, I want credit to Dr. Stephen Yulle for his help in creating the structure to hang these thoughts upon. Here is the first of the four. When you study the Bible you discover that...

I. God is infinitely Glorious in His Person:

1. Theologians refer to this as God's intrinsic glory. His very substance and Personhood are glorious beyond description.

2. We see this in Isaiah 6 (Turn there with me).

Read 6:1-3

- A. After hearing the seraphim declaring "Holy, Holy, Holy," we might naturally expect them to conclude by saying, "The whole earth is full of his Holiness." But's that's not what they say. Rather, "the earth is full of His Glory."
- B. Notice that the Seraphim say nothing about what God has done; nothing about salvation, or judgment, or even creation. Isaiah is merely experiencing an unexpected revelation of God's person... and it was terrifyingly glorious!
- C. And notice the prophet's response. He didn't dance with glee. There was no

¹ Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back Into Grace*, (), 199

“Happy days are here again.” No, the very prophet of the Lord fell on his face like a dead man (5) and pronounced a curse on Himself, “Woe is me! I am undone (lost)! For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

D. You see, beloved. An authentic understanding – a biblical vision- of God’s intrinsic glory doesn’t leave you feeling happy and satisfied. It reduces you to nothing and causes the sinner to tremble with fear.

3. This is where the gospel begins. You will never know the overwhelming joy, relief, and satisfaction of the gospel until you understand the peril you are in as a sinner standing before the thrice-holy God. The bad news must be really bad if the good news is to be truly glorious to us. This is God’s intrinsic glory. It is God’s eternal glory. It is the glory that the three Person’s of the Godhead shared eternally before anything outside of Himself was called into existence.

4. God is infinitely glorious in His Person

II. God alone is worthy of receiving glory:

1. Through Isaiah God threatened Israel with Judgment because of their idolatry by declaring (42:8) “I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give my glory to another...”

2. Here God is NOT speaking of His intrinsic glory but to what we might call His Ascribed Glory.

3. You see, the reason God created man was NOT because He was lonely. He wasn’t lonely. He was infinitely happy, and satisfied in Himself for all eternity. His only experience for eternity was complete fullness. We might say he lacked any lack. Medieval theologians called this the “full bucket problem.”² How do we explain in human terms that God’s eternal joy has always been as complete as a completely full bucket is full? God has never been lonely. So why did he create man? God created man to go public with His glory.

4. God wanted to share His infinite goodness with beings who were created with the unique capacity to apprehend it, enjoy it, and be satisfied in it. That’s why He created man. He wanted the overflow of His joy to spill out upon others for their good and his glory. And that’s why he created the universe. The Cosmos exists to display the vast and infinite glory of God.

5. We learn this from the Bible in texts like Psalm 19 where David affirms, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims his handiwork.” You see, my friend? That’s what the cosmos is for. When you look into the night sky, or when you click that “Star gazer” app on your phone that identifies all the stars and shows the Milkyway in real time. When you consider the seemingly infinite space between stars and galaxies, and wonder

² R. C. Sproul Jr., *After Darkness, Light*, (Phillipsburg, P&R, 2003), 194

“What is all that space out there for?” This is what it’s for! It exists to reveal something of the Infinite Creator who made it without ever exerting any effort at all.

6. How should we respond? We should respond like David did in Psalm 8, “O Yahweh, my Adonai, how majestic is your name!” And it was this same David who urged (Psa. 29), “Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name...”

7. To ascribe the glory due His name means that we recognize it when we see it, we delight in it, and we proclaim it. By doing so, God is glorified and we are deeply satisfied.

8. No less than Jonathan Edwards weighs in via his 18th century book, *The End For Which God Created the World*. He writes,

The end (or goal) of creation is that creation might glorify God. Now what is glorifying God, but rejoicing at the glory he has displayed? The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God by which also God is magnified and exalted.³

9. If Edwards is right, as I think he is, then God’s insistence that man glorify Him is not a selfish expectation. Rather, it is an invitation for man to find his highest joy and deepest hope in the Greatest Good which is God Himself. Therefore, “The exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one and the same.”⁴ Do you want the highest joy and deepest hope a human being can enjoy? Set your gaze upon the glory of God and hold it there until your soul is duly impressed.

10. When you look around and see the beauty of creation; when you see the autumn leaves, and beautiful ducks and geese, and clouds, and streams, and gorgeous sunsets, and when you read His word, you can experience joy in God by ascribing to Him the glory due His name. You get the joy and He is glorified.

11. The problem, however, is that man is hardwired from birth to deny the glory of God and to suppress the glory of God and worship the creature rather than the Creator. That’s why the Bible so frequently warns about idolatry. God is belittled and mocked any time man worships anything other than Him because alone is man’s highest good.

12. Again, Paul says in Roman 1, that this is why the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. They suppress the truth about God even though they clearly see his “eternal power and divine nature” in what God has made. “Therefore, they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:18-20).

13. And that’s why the third point is so important.

14. First, God is infinitely glorious in His person. Second, God alone is worthy of receiving Glory.

³ John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 1998), 32

⁴ Ibid, 32

III. God has most powerfully revealed his glory in man's salvation.

1. God did not send His Son to save the world from climate change, melting icebergs, air pollution, shrinking rain forests, or the extinction of endangered animals. He sent His Son to save sinners from His own just and holy wrath which constitutes their just wages because of sin.

2. John 17 reveals Jesus' high-priestly prayer to the Father on the night before His crucifixion. He prayed:

- (1) "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify you."
- (4) "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do.
- (5) Now, Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."

3. What is Jesus talking about? He is speaking of How God intends to glorify Himself and His Son to the greatest degree possible; namely, through the once-for-all substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

4. Think of the most beautiful display of God's creation that you have ever seen. Think of the Grand Canyon, or Victoria Falls. Think of the Marianna Trench and the indescribable sea creatures in its depths. Think of your grand-children, or the most breath-taking space nebula the Hubble Telescope ever discovered! All of these were created for the glory of God, but all of them combined would pale in significance when compared to the glory of the incarnation, active obedience, and atoning sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

5. God has revealed His glory in many ways, but has most powerfully revealed His glory in man's salvation.

6. And then, last of all.

IV. The doctrine of Justification in particular manifests God's glory.

1. Now we have come full circle. We are back to the doctrine of Soli Deo Gloria – To God Alone be the Glory. This is the doctrine that stands like the morning star over the other four doctrines of the Reformation. God has orchestrated the reconciliation of sinners to Himself in such a way that man receives all of the eternal benefits and God gets ALL the glory. Not MOST of the glory, but ALL the glory.

2. The Roman Catholic model of salvation puts man at the center. Yes, in their view God has to provide all the material for salvation. Yes, God infuses grace into the soul of the penitent believer to increase his righteousness. But at the end of the day the sinner is either meriting more grace by his works or losing the grace he has via mortal sin. And then, even if he has played by the rules his whole life, he still must experience the fires of purgatory to purify his soul for heaven. And where did that doctrine come from? What is the source of the doctrine

of purgatory, the treasury of merit, prayer to the saints, the offer of indulgences, and many others like them? They come from the sin-stained imaginations of the minds of men and NOT From Scripture.

3. The Reformers great concern with Roman Catholic doctrine was that at the end of the day, even in the best case scenario, the credit (or glory)for salvation must be divided between God and man. The sinner will have done his part and there have something to boast in. He worked hard enough; he was sufficiently faithful, generous, prayerful, humble, and devout. Salvation in this soteriological scheme would be to the glory of the pope and the sinner with significant contribution from God. Not so in the biblical redemption.

4. Turn with me to Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

- 1:3-4 Salvation begins with God's choice from before the foundation of the world.
- 1:5 God predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.
- 1:6 This kind of salvation is exclusively to the praise of His glorious grace.
- 1:7 In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.
- 1:11 God predestined us according to His purpose who works All Things according to the counsel of His will.
- 1:12 so that we would be to the Praise of His Glory!

5. Now I ask you, what contribution has the sinner made so far. Answer: NONE! There is nothing that the sinner has done that is worthy of praise or boasting. But let's continue.

- 2:1 You were Dead in your trespasses and sins. (how dead is dead?)
- Read 2-3

6. What contribution has the sinner made in these verses? He has contributed Nothing but his sin.

- 2:4 But God... (Read 4-6)

7. Why did God do it that way?

- Read 7. In other words, so that He alone will get the glory.
- Read 2:8-9

8. In other words, on the authority of Scripture alone we learn that sinners are justified by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone, so that it will be to the glory of God alone.

9. Now turn with me to one more text.

Read 1 Cor. 1:26-29

10. Then finally, why did God design redemption in this way? Read 1:29

11. Then how are we saved? Read 30-31

12. Finally, turn with me to Romans 11. After Paul explains the same truth in shocking detail in chaps 8-10

Read Rom. 11:33-36a

“From Him, and Through Him, and to Him are all things.” In other words, He is the Source of all things. He is the Sustainer of all things, and He is the Goal of all things. Therefore, Paul concludes (36b), To Him be the glory for ever and ever, amen.

13. You see beloved, salvation is by grace alone

so that it will be to God’s glory alone.

Salvation is by faith alone,

So that it will be to God’s glory alone.

Salvation is in Christ alone,

So that it will be to God’s glory alone

And we come to understand this great salvation through Scripture alone,

So that it will be to God’s glory alone.

Conclusion:

1. How should the believer respond? The next verse in Romans declares (read 12:1)
2. If you have yet to settle with Christ. If you have not place ALL of your hope of in Jesus Christ so that on the last day you will discover God as Father rather than God as Judge, then listen to the words of Jesus because they are for you:

“Come to me all you are weary and heaven laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls.”

Come to Jesus and say, “I have nothing to offer you but my sin. By your grace I believe that Jesus is my only hope. Will you accept me?” And know for certain that God is the One who delights in nothing more than justifying the ungodly.

And to that we say, Soli Deo Gloria:

To God Alone Be the Glory!

