

# *I Will Build My Church*

## The Purpose and Characteristics of Christ's Church 8 Expository Worship and the Church of the First Born

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March 8, 2020

### **Colossians 1:13-20**

**13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,**

**14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

**15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**

**16 For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.**

**17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.**

**18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

**19 For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,**

**20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.**

To the Glory of God

In 1559, Guido deBres, who was one of the early Leaders of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, wrote down what has since come to be called "*The Belgic Confession*". And this document was a series of 37 Questions and Answers that helped to define "biblical Christianity", or "Orthodoxy", in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> Century. And this Confession is still used today by many of the European Reformed churches.

The Confession forms a part of what is called the "Three Forms of Unity" of the Dutch Reformed Church, which consist of:

1. The Belgic Confession
2. The Canons of Dort

### 3. The Heidelberg Catechism<sup>1</sup>

... which helps people understand what it means to be saved and a part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. And in "Article 29" of the Belgic Confession, the early Leaders of the Protestant Reformation sought to define what a true Church looks like, and they came up with this definition:

We believe that we ought to discern  
diligently and very carefully,  
by the Word of God,  
what is the true church—  
for all sects in the world today  
claim for themselves the name of "the church."  
We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites  
who are mixed among the good in the church  
and who nonetheless are not part of it,  
even though they are physically there.  
But we are speaking of distinguishing  
the body and fellowship of the true church  
from all sects that call themselves "the church."  
The true church can be recognized  
if it has the following marks:  
The church engages in the pure preaching  
of the gospel;  
it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments  
as Christ instituted them;  
it purely practices church discipline  
for correcting faults.  
In short, it governs itself  
according to the pure Word of God,  
rejecting all things contrary to it  
and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.  
By these marks one can be assured  
of recognizing the true church—  
and no one ought to be separated from it.  
As for those who can belong to the church,  
we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians:

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<sup>1</sup> The Catechism that we use in the Covenant of Peace Church is based on the *Heidelberg Catechism*

namely by faith,  
and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness,  
once they have received the one and only Savior,  
Jesus Christ.  
They love the true God and their neighbors,  
without turning to the right or left,  
and they crucify the flesh and its works.  
Though great weakness remains in them,  
they fight against it  
by the Spirit  
all the days of their lives,  
appealing constantly  
to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus,  
in whom they have forgiveness of their sins,  
through faith in him.  
As for the false church,  
it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances  
than to the Word of God;  
it does not want to subject itself  
to the yoke of Christ;  
it does not administer the sacraments  
as Christ commanded in his Word;  
it rather adds to them or subtracts from them  
as it pleases;  
it bases itself on humans,  
more than on Jesus Christ;  
it persecutes those  
who live holy lives according to the Word of God  
and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.  
These two churches  
are easy to recognize  
and thus to distinguish  
from each other.

... so, this 16<sup>th</sup> Century Effort by the Reformers taught that there were three main "marks" of a true Church:

1. The pure Preaching of the biblical Gospel.

2. The pure Administration of the Sacraments as Christ instituted them.
3. The pure Practice of "Church Discipline" for correcting faults.

... and then, the Confession goes on to *summarize* these three "marks" by saying:

In short, it [the Church] governs itself  
according to the pure Word of God,  
rejecting all things contrary to it  
and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.

... which is in accord with what the Apostle Paul penned down in **Colossians 1:17&18:**

**He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

Now we are right in the middle of a new Sermon Series to begin this new year by defining just what a real, biblical Church looks like, so we can actually become a church like that so that we may bring Honor and Glory to the Lord Christ.

And, so far, we carefully examined how the Nicene Creed defined the Church (One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic), and so, this morning I want to look at how the Belgic Confession defines a true Church.

## **1. The Pure Preaching of the Biblical Gospel**

Now George Whitefield<sup>2</sup> believed in preaching, and he gave his life to that noble undertaking. And through his preaching, God did a mighty Work of Salvation on both sides of the Atlantic. His biographer, Arnold Dallimore, chronicled the astonishing effect that Whitefield's preaching had in Britain and America in the eighteenth century:

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<sup>2</sup> 27 December 1714- 30 September 1770. Whitefield preached over 18,000 Sermons- which is an average of 474 Sermons every year (1.3 Sermons every day) for 38 years.

“It came like rain on the parched land and made the desert spring forth with the flowers of righteousness.”

Dallimore lifted his eyes from the transformed wasteland of Whitefield’s time and expressed his longing that God would do this again. He cried out for a new generation of preachers like Whitefield. And his words help me express what I long for in the coming generations of preachers here in America and around the world. Dallimore said:

“Yea . . . that we shall see the great Head of the Church once more . . . raise up unto Himself certain young men whom He may use in this glorious employ. And what manner of men will they be? Men mighty in the Scriptures, their lives dominated by a sense of the greatness, the majesty and holiness of God, and their minds and hearts aglow with the great truths of the doctrines of grace. They will be men who have learned what it is to die to self, to human aims and personal ambitions; men who are willing to be “fools for Christ’s sake”, who will bear reproach and falsehood, who will labor and suffer, and whose supreme desire will be, not to gain earth’s accolades, but to win the Master’s approbation when they appear before His awesome judgment seat. They will be men who will preach with broken hearts and tear-filled eyes, and upon whose ministries God will grant an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit, and who will witness “signs and wonders following” in the transformation of multitudes of human lives.”<sup>3</sup>

Look again at the various characteristics that Dallimore longed for in the men who would herald God’s Word. Dallimore begged God for men, who were:

- Mighty in the Scriptures
- Aglow with the great Truths of the Doctrines of Grace
- Dead to Self
- Willing to labor and suffer
- Indifferent to the accolades of Man
- Broken over Sin
- Dominated by a sense of the Greatness, the Majesty, and Holiness of God

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold Dallimore; *George Whitefield*, vol. 1, page 16

Dallimore, like Whitefield, believed that preaching is the “heralding of God’s Word” from that kind of heart.

Now after you read God’s Word, even a little you come to some very powerful conclusions about the *necessity*, and the *weightiness*, and the *value* of Preaching. We find both what Preaching is and what it is not.

- ✓ Preaching is *not* conversation
- ✓ Preaching is *not* discussion
- ✓ Preaching is not sharing
- ✓ Preaching is *not* casual talk about religious things
- ✓ Preaching is *not* Teaching
- ✓ Preaching is the heralding of a heavenly Message, permeated by the sense of God’s Greatness and Majesty and Holiness.

... and the Topic may be anything under the sun, but it is *always* brought into the blazing Light of God’s Greatness and Majesty in His Word. And *that* was the way Whitefield preached. And *that* is the way we should preach today.

And no one embodied that view of Preaching in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century better than Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who served the Westminster Chapel in London for thirty years. When J. I. Packer was a twenty-two-year-old student, he heard Lloyd-Jones preach every Sunday evening in London during the school year of 1948–1949. And Packer said:

“I had never heard such preaching.”

... and over the years, I have become convinced that this is *why* so many people, who are a part of the visible modern church, so easily and so often say so many *minimizing* and *foolish* things about Preaching: they have never actually heard real Preaching. And so, they have no basis from which to comprehend the importance and usefulness of true Preaching. Packer said that it came to him:

“with the force of electric shock, bringing . . . more of a sense of God than any other man” he had known<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Five Evangelical Leaders*, 170

That's what Whitefield meant when he said:

“Oh, that God would raise up young preachers who leave their hearers with a spiritual sense of shock at the sense of God — some sense of the infinite Weight of the Reality of God.”<sup>5</sup>

And that is my greatest longing for our day as well, and for us here at the Covenant of Peace Church and all around the world, that God would be Good to us, to raise up thousands of broken-hearted, Bible-saturated Preachers who are *dominated* by a sense of the Greatness and the Majesty and the Holiness of God, as revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen and reigning with absolute Authority over every nation, and every army, and every false religion, and every terrorist, and every disease, every evil decision, and every cancer cell, and every galaxy in the Universe.

At some point in our lives, we must come to the conclusion that God did *not* ordain the Cross of Christ, or create the Lake of Fire, in order to communicate the *insignificance* of belittling His Glory. There are two main things, two *titanic* things, two *powerful* and *inescapable* things:

1. The Death of the sinless Son of God
2. The Damnation of unrepentant human beings

... these are the loudest shouts under Heaven that God is infinitely Holy, and Sin is *infinitely* offensive, and Wrath is *infinitely* Just, and Grace is *infinitely* precious. And our brief life, the life of every person in our churches and in our communities, will lead to either everlasting Joy or everlasting Suffering. And if our preaching does not carry the Weight and the Urgency of these things to our people, what will? Christian Comedians? Veggie Tales?

From Eternity Past, God planned for His Son to be beaten and crucified (**The Revelation 13:8; 2 Timothy 1:9**), and for Hell to be so terrible that we tremble as we speak about it (**Matthew 25:41**), so that we would have the clearest witnesses possible to what is at stake when we Preach. What gives Preaching its Seriousness is that the Mantle of

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<sup>5</sup> Arnold Dallimore; *George Whitefield*, vol. 1, page 64

the Preacher is soaked with the Blood of Jesus and singed with the Fire of Hell. And that's the Mantle that turns mere "talkers" into real Preachers.

Yet tragically, some of the most prominent Evangelical voices of our day consistently *diminish* the Horror of the Cross, and the Horror of Hell, the one stripped of its Power to bear our Punishment, and the other minimized into shallow and ridiculous comparisons to low Self-esteem or not fulfilling the carnal and materialistic whims of a pagan world.

Oh, that the rising generations would see that our world is *not* overrun with a sense of Seriousness about God. And after reading and studying the Bible for 2,000 years, nobody talks too much or too deeply or too urgently about God today. There is no surplus in the modern Church about a sense of God's Glory. And there is no "excess of Earnestness" in the Church about things like Heaven and Hell and Sin and Salvation and Holiness. And therefore, the Joy and Satisfaction that the average Christian has in God is paper thin.

By the tens of millions, people today are literally amusing themselves to death with DVDs, and 86-inch TV screens, and mindless video games on their cell phones, and "slapstick worship", while the spokesmen of a vicious and brutal man-made religion write letters to the West in major American publications<sup>6</sup> saying:

"The first thing we are calling you to is Islam . . . It is the religion of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil with the hand, tongue and heart. It is the religion of jihad in the way of Allah so that Allah's Word and religion reign Supreme."

... this after more people were slaughtered on 9/11 by this "religion of peace" than we lost in Pearl Harbor back in 1941. So, what should we get out of this? That the intentional murder of 3,000 people was actually an Evangelistic effort by this false and pagan cult to acquire more converts. Because these very same spokesmen repeatedly and publicly bless the suicide bombers, who routinely blow up ten-year old children and call that the path to Paradise. This is the world in which we preach.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/03/on-the-other-side-of-the-gates>



And yet, incomprehensibly, in this Christ-diminishing, soul-destroying age, untold numbers of books, and seminars, and divinity schools, and church growth gurus raise their collective voices to young Pastors and counsel them, "*Lighten up.*" "*Get funny.*" "*Do something amusing.*" "*Don't be so serious.*"

To all this I ask, "*Where is the biblical Jesus?*" As we see "spiritual Entertainment" replace "godly Edification", as we see more and more Compromise, and as we see an almost universal *abandonment* of pursuing Holiness on purpose, where is the Head of the Church Who said things like:

**Matthew 16:24&25**

**Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.**

... and ....

**Matthew 5:29&30**

**If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.**

... and ...

**Luke 14:33**

**So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.**

... and ...

**Luke 14:26**

**If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.**

... and ...

**Matthew 8:22b**

**... Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."**

...and...

**Mark 10:44**

**whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.**

...and...

**Matthew 10:28**

**Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**

...and...

**Luke 21:16-19**

**But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.**

If Jesus were alive on the earth today, there is no doubt in my mind that the local "Ministerial Fellowship Society" would come up to the incarnate God and say, "*Lighten up, Jesus. Do something amusing.*" And the reason I know this to be true is because they already go to the Pastors and say things like, "*Whatever you do, Pastor, don't be like the Jesus of the Gospels. Lighten up.*" And from my perspective, which feels very close to Eternity these days that Message to Pastors sounds increasingly insane.

My dear friends, the Reality is that what you believe about both the *necessity* and the *nature* of Preaching is governed by your sense of the Greatness and the Glory of God, and how you believe people *awaken* to that Glory, and how they begin to *live* for that Glory. So, this next section of my Sermon presents a portrayal of the Glory of God, and the third will deal with how people *awaken* to that Glory and are changed by it.

## A Portrayal of the Glory of God

We must understand that from beginning to end, *nothing* in the Bible is more Central to God's Purpose and more Ultimate in the Mind and Heart of God than the Glory of God. It is the most important theme in the entire Bible. And yet, it is talked and taught and preached about less than anything else. So, just what is the "Glory of God?" The Glory of God is the Beauty of God, or the Radiance of His manifold Perfections. And at every point in God's revealed Actions, and wherever He makes plain the *ultimate* Goal of that Action, the Goal is always the same:

### To uphold and display His Own Glory

For example:

- God predestined us for His Glory (**Ephesians 1:6**).
- God created us for His Glory (**Isaiah 43:7**)
- God elected Israel for His Glory (**Jeremiah 13:11**).
- God rescued His people from Egypt for His Glory (**Psalms 106:8**).
- God rescued them from the Exile for His Glory (**Isaiah 48:9-11**).
- God sent Jesus into the world so that Gentiles would praise God for His Glory (**Romans 15:9**).
- God commands all His people that whether they eat or drink, to do all things for His Glory (**1 Corinthians 10:31**).
- God will send Jesus back to earth in such a way that all the redeemed will marvel at His Glory (**2 Thessalonians 1:9&10**).
- Therefore the most urgent and most important Goal of the Church is: "**Declare His Glory among the nations, His marvelous Works among all peoples**" (**Psalms 96:3**).

These verses (and a hundred more) drive us back up into the *ultimate* Allegiance of God. And nothing affects Preaching more deeply than to be struck almost speechless, *almost*, by the white-hot Passion that God Himself has for the Glory of God. What is crystal clear from the whole range of biblical Revelation is that God's ultimate Allegiance is:

- A. To know Himself *perfectly*
- B. To love Himself *infinitely*
- C. To share this Experience, as much as it can be, with His people

Therefore, over every Act of God flies this banner:

### **Isaiah 48:11**

**For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.**

From all Eternity, the *ever-existing, never-becoming, always-perfect* God has known Himself. And He *loves* what He knows. God has eternally seen His Own Beauty and He has savored what He sees. God's understanding of His Own Reality is absolutely *flawless*, and His Exuberance in enjoying that Reality is infinite. God has no needs, because He has no imperfections. God has no inclinations to Evil because He has no deficiencies that could tempt Him to do wrong. God is, therefore, the Holiest and the Happiest Being that is, or that can be conceived. Human beings simply cannot conceive of a Happiness *greater* than the Happiness of infinite Power, delighting in infinite Beauty, all within the personal Fellowship of the three Persons of the Trinity! And *that* is what we should preach.

And so, the only reason that God created the Universe with the dirt and gravity and water and wheat and cotton and oxygen is to house the creatures, who have been chosen, so that He may share the Experience of knowing and enjoying His Glory with them.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, every fiber of God is determined to gather a people together so they will know Him, and enjoy Him in the very *same* way that He knows and enjoys Himself.

Indeed, God's primary Purpose through both Creation and Salvation is that the very Knowledge that God has *of* Himself, and the very Joy that God has *in* Himself will be *our* Knowledge and *our* Enjoyment to the End that we know God with His Own Knowledge, and that we enjoy God with His Own Joy! And that is the ultimate Meaning of Jesus's Prayer (**John 17**), when He asked His Father:

**that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.**

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<sup>7</sup> And God also houses the "non-elect", who have been chosen to receive the Justice of God

The Father's Knowledge of and Joy in "the radiance of the Glory of the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ" (**Hebrews 1:3**), will be in us because Jesus is in us.

Now we live in a day when there is not much discussion or talk or prayer or preaching or teaching about the "Glory of God". There is, however, a whole lot of Preaching and Teaching about the "Love of God", but not much about "God's Glory". Yet, I will tell you that they are wondrously connected. But, how? If God is *infinitely* concerned about being glorified, how can God then love *me*? Where does God's Love for me fit in with this radical Theology about God and His Glory?

In other words, *how* does God's overriding Passion for His Own Glory relate to God's Love? *How* does God's Plan to share this Experience (of knowing Himself and enjoying Himself) with us relate to the Love of God?". And the Answer is:

God's Goal to share that Experience with unworthy rebels *is* the Love of God.

I have been deeply and profoundly troubled for many years now about how the Love of God is portrayed by far too many within the modern church. Almost universally, God's Love has become "humanized" in that it is almost *always* portrayed using "human reasoning" and "human logic", using "human examples" rather than using Scripture. And the result is that we equate God's Love with the love that a Mother has for her child, or like a Father has for his son, or the way a soldier loves his country. And those are wonderful and sweet and beautiful portrayals. But they *cheapen* and *lower* the Love of God to be nothing more than what fallen human beings can manifest every day. The Truth is that God's Love is *infinitely* better, and higher, and deeper, and more important than any type of love than human beings can manifest. God's Love is *unique*. No one can duplicate it. It CAN'T be copied, even though it MUST be something we strive for. God's Love is inherent in His Own perfect and pristine Nature.

So, in this context, God's Love is His absolute Commitment to do *whatever has to be done, for as long as it needs to be done*, so that He may share the Knowledge and Enjoyment that He has for His Own Glory with chosen sinners. So, for example, in **1 John 4:8&16**, when the Apostle John said "**God is love**", he meant that it is God's Nature to

share the Enjoyment of His Glory with His elect, even if it costs the Life of His Son. And it did. God paid the ultimate Price so that He could affect the ultimate Reward.

And that means that God's Goal to *display* His Glory, and our Delight *in* that Glory, are in perfect harmony. Because there is an overriding Principle that has to be understood and followed:

We do not fully honor that which we don't fully enjoy.

... or, to say it positively:

We only honor something fully if we enjoy it fully

.. or, to say it yet another way:

If we desire to honor something fully, we must enjoy it fully

So, in the case of God, if we do not *enjoy* God, we aren't really *honoring* Him, at least not in fullness. And that means that *Forced* Obedience or *Fearful* Obedience DOES NOT glorify God. Only *Glad* Obedience, *Joyful* Obedience can show that Jesus is *better* than *anything* this world can give to us, and He is better than *anything* this world can take away from us.

So, *part* of God's Will in Salvation is NOT to merely forgive us, but to so radically *change* us so that we begin to delight ourselves in God and NOT in things that are passing away. Because it is our genuine Delight in God (not merely the "mechanics" of Obedience) that *proves* or *illustrates* or *shows* the great Value and Worth of Jesus Christ. The one, true, and living God is NOT glorified *fully* by merely being known. But God is glorified by being known and enjoyed so deeply that our lives become a display of His Worth.

Jesus said two things to emphasize His Role in giving us both the Knowledge and the Joy of God:

**Matthew 11:27**

**All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.**

### **John 15:11**

**These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.**

In other words, we can only *know* the Father *with the Knowledge of the Son*. And we can only *enjoy* the Father *with the Joy of the Son*. So, we simply can't "work this up". We can't *manufacture* this kind of Knowledge or this Joy. We *receive* the gracious Gift of both the Knowledge and Joy from Jesus. So, in, by, and through the Miracle of the New Birth, Jesus has made us partakers of His Own Knowledge of His Father, and His very Own enjoyment of His Father.

But the way this becomes visible in the world is NOT mainly by passionate acts of Corporate Worship on the Lord's Day, as precious as those moments are, but by the changes that this Gift (of Knowledge and Joy) produces in our lives. Jesus Himself said:

### **Matthew 5:16**

**Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

... and the Light that shines through our Good Works and causes people to see God, not us, is the all-satisfying Worth of God's Glory.

And it works something like this: When the Glory of God becomes the Treasure of our lives, our response will be that we will no longer lay up treasures upon the earth, but we will spend them for the advancement and propagation and spread of His Glory to more and more people. When we begin to know God (as Jesus knows God), and when we begin to enjoy God (as Jesus enjoys God), we will no longer covet more of this world's goods, but our hearts will overflow with liberality. We will no longer crave the praise of men, but we will literally lose ourselves in praising God. We will no longer be mastered by sinful or sensual pleasures, but we will sever the root of those sins by the Power of a superior Promise. We will no longer nurse a wounded ego, or cherish a grudge, or nurture a vengeful spirit, but we will hand over our Cause to God and bless those who hate us. And that Reality leads me to make a statement of Doctrine:

Every Sin flows out from a failure to treasure the Glory of God above all things.

Therefore, one crucial, visible way to display the Truth and Value of the Glory of God is by humble, sacrificial lives of Service that flow out from the Fountain of God's all-satisfying Glory.

But how in the world are we supposed to become a people like that? How are we awakened to the Glory of God and become changed by it? One essential part of the answer is given by the Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 3:18-4:6**:

**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. 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.**

Now look again at **3:18**:

**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.**

So, as we "behold the Glory of the Lord", we are transformed from one degree of Glory to another. This is God's Way of changing people into the Image of His Son so that they reflect the Glory of the Lord. And to be changed in the way that glorifies God, we fix our gaze on the Glory of the Lord.

So, *how* does this happen? (We're moving very close to the implications for the kind of "Pure Preaching" that the Belgic Confession said was a "Mark" of a true Church.) In **2 Corinthians 4:3&4**, Paul explains just how we behold the Glory of the Lord:



**And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

... and so, the fulfillment of **2 Corinthians 3:18**; the Goal of being transformed from one realm of Glory to the next, is:

**The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

So, the Apostle teaches us that we behold the Glory of the Lord most clearly and most crucially *in the Gospel*. So much so that in **2 Corinthians 4:4** Paul calls it:

**... the Gospel of the Glory of Christ...**

... which means (and this has enormous implications for Preaching) that in this life, when we *cannot* see the Glory of the Lord in fullness (like we will when He comes back), we **DO** see it, and we **WILL** see it most clearly by means of God's Word! And that means that the Gospel is a *Message* in words!

Now, normally, Words are *heard* and Glory is *seen*. Yet Paul teaches here that we "see the Glory of Christ" in this life **NOT** mainly with our eyes, but through our *ears*.

**Romans 10:17**

**So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**

Now as strange as this may seem to us, the Holy Bible says that our ability to "see" the Glory of Christ comes through "hearing" the Word of Christ. And our "hearing" comes through the Word of Christ, Who is the Image of God!

Now just imagine how this Truth was expressed back in the life of the Prophet Samuel. Samuel himself wrote:

**1 Samuel 3:1b**

**... [A] word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent.**

So, just like today, there was a “famine”, not for bread or water, but a famine of hearing the Words of the Lord. And the result was that very few people saw and enjoyed the Glory of God. But then God raised up a new Prophet. And how did God appear to this new Prophet? The very *same* way He will appear to you and me:

### **1 Samuel 3:21**

**And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, because the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.**

God revealed Himself “by” and “through” and “in” the Word. And this is *how* people today will behold the Glory of the Lord and be changed into the kind of people who make God’s Glory known throughout the world: by the Word of the Lord! And Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 4:4** that the Word that reveals the Glory of God most *clearly*, and most *centrally*, is the Gospel.

And this brings me to the concluding point on Preaching, that Preaching is actually “*Expository Worship*”. And this is what the Belgic Confession talks about as a “Mark” of a true Church. Because if it is the main Goal of God that we display His Glory throughout the world, and if we display that Glory because we have been changed by knowing and enjoying it, and if we know and enjoy it by beholding the Glory of the Lord, and if we behold that Glory most clearly and centrally in the Gospel of the Glory of Christ, and if the Gospel is a Message delivered in Words to the world, THEREFORE, what follows is that God intends for Preachers to unfold these Words (Exposition) and to rejoice over them (Worship), which is WHY I call the “Pure Preaching” that the Belgic Confession said was a “Mark” of a true Church *Expository Worship!*

Every inspired Word in the Scriptures matter. And that means that “Pure Preaching” MUST be “Expository” because there is so much about the Gospel that cries out to be explained. Now the word “Exposit” means: *to open; to unfold; to clarify; explain; and display*. And we can see this when we focus on five essential Dimensions of the Gospel Message.

***1. The Gospel is a Message about true Historical Events:*** the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, summoning us to open them

with thorough expositions of inspired sentences and paragraphs and chapters.

***2. The Gospel is a Message about what those Events achieved before we experienced anything or even existed:*** the completion of perfect Obedience by Jesus, the Payment for our Sins, the removal of the Wrath of God, forever, the Installation of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah and King of the Universe, the absolute disarming of the Rulers and Authorities, the destruction of Death, all of these summoning us to open them with thorough expositions of inspired sentences and paragraphs and chapters.

***3. The Gospel is a Message about the Transfer of these Achievements from Christ to particular persons through our Union with Christ by Faith alone, apart from human works***, which summons us to open for our people the nature and dynamics of Faith by the exposition of inspired sentences and paragraphs and chapters.

***4. The Gospel is a Message about the Good things that are now true about us as the Achievement of the Cross is applied to us in Christ:*** that God is only merciful to us now instead of wrathful (Propitiation), that we are counted Righteous in Christ now (Justification), that we are freed now from the Guilt and Power of Sin (Redemption), that we are positionally and progressively made Holy (Sanctification), all of which summons us to open these glorious Realities for our people week after week with thorough expositions of inspired sentences and paragraphs and chapters.

***5. The Gospel is a Message about the glorious God Himself as our final, eternal, all-satisfying Treasure.***

**Romans 5:11**

**And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

The Gospel we preach is “the Gospel of the Glory of Christ, Who is the Image of God.” But if our Preaching doesn’t encapsulate this and

articulate it and display it and show it to the people, then we are *not* preaching “the Gospel of the Glory of God in the Face of Christ” (**2 Corinthians 4:6**).

So, the ultimate Goal of Salvation is knowing and enjoying God. And this is *why* we were created, that God might share with us the Knowledge and Enjoyment of Himself. And that is what it means for Him to love us. That is what the Cross ultimately obtained for us. And this too, by every text of Scripture, all of it inspired by God to awaken Hope in His Glory (**2 Timothy 3:16&17; Romans 15:4**) calls for the *richest* Exposition that our people may be fed the Best and Highest Food of Heaven.

Exposition of sentences and paragraphs and chapters is *essential* because the Gospel is a Message that comes to us in Words, and God has ordained that people see the Glory of Christ, the “unsearchable riches of Christ (**Ephesians 3:8**), in, by, and through those gospel Words. *That* is our Calling: to open the Words and Sentences and Paragraphs of Scripture and display “the Glory of Christ Who is the Image of God” through our Preaching.

And this leads to the second word in the phrase *Expository Worship*. Woe to us if we do our exposition of such a Gospel absent genuine Spirit and Truth Worship. When Paul said in **2 Corinthians 4:5**:

**For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake...**

... the word he used for “preach” is *kerussomen*, which means: *to herald*. So, Preaching is the *heralding* of Jesus as Lord, in all His spectacular Excellencies. ... and the *kerux*, the Proclaimer, the “Preacher” (**1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11**), may have to explain what he is saying if people don’t understand (so Teaching may be involved). But what sets the Herald apart from the Philosopher and the Scribe, and even the Teacher, is that he is the herald of News. And, in our case, he is the herald of *infinitely* Good News, *infinitely* valuable News. The *greatest* News in all the world!

The Creator of the Universe, Who is *more* glorious and *more* to be desired than any treasure on earth, has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ to be known and enjoyed forever by anyone in the world, who

will lay down the arms of rebellion, receive His Blood-bought Amnesty, and embrace His Son as Savior, Lord, and Treasure of their lives.

So, we must not lie about the Value of this Gospel by the dullness of our demeanor. Exposition of the most glorious Reality is, in itself, a glorious Reality. And if it is not Expository Worship, authentic from the heart, something false is being said about the Value of the Gospel. So, we must not say by our face or by our voice or by our life that the Gospel is *not* the Gospel of the all-satisfying Glory of Christ. Because, it is. And so, I pray that God will raise up from among us a generation of Preachers whose Exposition is worthy of the Truth of God, and whose Worship of that Truth is worthy of the Glory of God.

And if we dare to be that kind of people, we will qualify to be a real, true, biblical Church.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.