

Soli Deo Gloria – To God Alone be the Glory in Salvation

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on November 7, 2010

www.goldcountrybaptist.org

Last Sunday, Reformation Day, we were reminded of the great historic truth, *sola gratia*, salvation is by *grace alone*, as we saw in Ephesians 1:2-5. This morning in v. 6 we will see another one of the five central truths of that Reformation, in some ways the center pillar among the five pillars holding up the Reformation gospel: *Soli Deo Gloria* (to the *glory of God alone*). In salvation, God gets all the glory, and He will not share it with others. In the words of Paul in v. 6, salvation is “*to the praise of the glory of His grace...*”

We are not salvation’s ultimate reason, cause, or purpose –there is a much higher reason, cause, and purpose of salvation – God’s glory is first and foremost, then our good, in that order.

The Glory of God Alone has been called: ‘The flagship of the Reformation Fleet ... The flagship is the lead vessel in a group of vessels [in this case, 5 battle-ships], the designation given to that ship [that’s] looked upon as the largest ... most heavily armed, or ... the best known ship in the fleet. In military terms, it was the ship used by the commanding officer of a group of naval vessels. And the term originates, *flagship*, from the custom of that commanding officer, usually but not always, he would have been a flag officer. His ship would have flown a distinguished flag, one that set it out from all the other vessels in that particular fleet ...

[In the battle for truth nearly] 500 years ago a Reformation fleet [comes] storming, invading, taking over for God the continent of Europe, and the flagship of this Reformation fleet is [leading the way with the supremacy of the Glory of God] ... It is flying this distinguishing flag with these words emblazoned upon the flag *Soli Deo Gloria* (for the Glory of God Alone). On board that vessel, the Scripture text of Romans 11:36 is given prominent place [by the Admiral of the fleet]: *For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to [God] be the glory forever. Amen.*¹

The battle hymn of this Navy is sung to the praise of the glory of God’s grace (v.6). These sailors and soldiers in the Lord’s army all sing to honor their General. It binds them together. After victories, they sing God-centered and God-glorifying music, praising the glory of grace. The Reformation recovered Christ-exalting worship as God’s truth was marching on, glory Hallelujah. Luther wrote hymns, including last week’s “A Mighty Fortress is our God.”

As they began to understand the gospel of salvation by grace alone, the natural expression of God’s people was to praise the glory of God alone in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs (as 5:19 says). As we contemplate these truths, nothing should be more natural for us than to want to sing out and shout the praise of the glory of grace, as Paul does. When Paul considers these grand and glorious truths, worship, wonder, love and praise are not only his most natural expression, there is a supernatural explosion in v. 3ff.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,⁶ **to the praise of the glory of His grace ...¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory...***

v. 14b ...*to the praise of His glory.*

The Reformation rightly recovered the truth that the end or purpose or goal of salvation and all we do is ultimately all to God's glory alone (S.D.G.). Man is not the climax or cause of his salvation and takes no credit for it. All the glory for all of our salvation is all *of and to and for* God alone, no glory for man, no credit to man, no boasting by man (Ephesians 2:9).

Before the universe was created (1:4) God had this glorious plan. The purpose in v. 5 of our predestination to adoption is not merely that we become adopted members of God's family – Paul doesn't end in v. 5. He takes us to the ultimate purpose statement in v. 6 of salvation: "*to the praise of the glory of His grace ...*" This is also the ultimate purpose statement of the universe, as we'll see tonight.

In the century after Luther, a young man was born in 1685 in the same country of Germany, who took up those phrases we just read, rightly believing *God's glory alone* applies to and drives all of life. As a 23-year-old he announced his ultimate purpose in life was to create "well-regulated church music to the glory of God." He had been an orphan many years earlier but had been adopted physically into his brother's family, and later experienced spiritual adoption into God's family by grace alone (v. 5) and for the glory of God alone (v. 6).

A book *The Spiritual Lives of Great Composers* says: He 'spent his entire life in Germany, working primarily as a church musician ... this region [that] had been permeated by the legacy of Martin Luther, with his radical emphasis on a living, personal, Bible-based Christianity. Luther himself had been a musician, declaring music to be second only to the gospel itself. [This 23 yr old] was to be the Reformer's greatest musical disciple. [He] resoundingly echoed the convictions of Luther, claiming that "Music's only purpose should be for the glory of God ...". As he set about composing, he would frequently initial his blank manuscript pages with the marking [initials of Latin phrase] "Help me, Jesus" ... or ... "In the name of Jesus". At the manuscript's end, [he] routinely initialed the letters "S.D.G." (*Soli Deo Gloria*—"To God alone, the glory"). To [him], these were not trite religious slogans, but sincere expressions of personal devotion. [Who is this composer? Johann Sebastian Bach]

Throughout history, Bach has been acclaimed as *the* Christian composer, almost a kind of "patron saint" for church musicians. All around the world, he is recognized as one of the greatest composers who has ever lived ... he actually represents the culmination of centuries abounding with Christian music. The sheer number of works he composed is staggering, however, and so is their diversity ... chorales, cantatas, ... oratorios, passions, concerti, and solo works for virtually every instrument of his day. Bach was prolific in other areas of life as well: he worked in a variety of demanding jobs ... and fathered twenty children [!], several of whom also matured into noted musicians.

... Nothing in life, however mundane, was considered to be unspiritual ... In his spiritual outlook, Bach made no real distinction between sacred and secular music. For instance, at the beginning of such a "secular" work as his *Little Organ Book*, he wrote this dedication: "To God alone the praise be given for what's herein to man's use written." [Another] *Book*, like so many of his compositions, was inscribed "In the Name of Jesus" ... Bach was a devoted reader of the Bible and other religious volumes. His personal library contained ... two different editions of Martin Luther's collected works and dozens of books by Luther's disciples and champions of the 17th and 18th centuries ...

... favorite passages [included] 2 Chron. 5:13, describing a temple worship service in ancient Israel with these words: “*The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord.... Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service ... for the glory of the Lord filled the temple ...*”²

Bach wanted overwhelming glory to fill the place of worship. He knew the truth of Eph. 1:6 and the Reformation motto S.D.G. as sole goal for all of life, and the only explanation of grace.

In the musical “Sound of Music,” Maria, in trying to explain how the captain could suddenly be attracted to her, sings these lines I referenced last week: “Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could. *So somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good.*” That’s the natural assumption of human nature, that there has to be some explanation *in us* for good done *to us*. Even as believers we may assume somewhere deep inside us there must have been something good in us that explains v. 4-5; our good upbringing, inclination, choice, or something good God saw or foresaw within us that moved Him to be good to us and save us. One survey found that more than 50% of people in evangelical churches think “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse. 84% of the Christians surveyed weren’t sure it was a direct quote from the Bible, but they thought it was a true biblical idea.

When Paul bursts into song or praise in v. 3, it’s because there was nothing good in him or about his upbringing. See Phil. 3 where he saw his “goodness” as rubbish, offensive manure, or Rom. 3 where he says God doesn’t see any good in any man. When Paul thinks of his own sudden conversion and his surprising attraction to Christ as the Captain of his soul, he knows it was not something in Paul. The sole explanation is found in God, S.D.G.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is matchless worship for the magnificence of glorious grace. It’s been compared to the overture of an opera. It is a stirring and stunning opening piece in this opus conducted by Paul the maestro, who directs one instrument after another to strike this high note 3x in the introduction: *the praise of the glory of God’s grace*. It hits a crescendo in chapter 3.

3:20 *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

This is the climax and apex of Ephesians that the rest of the book builds upon. At the center of this letter is the centrality and the supremacy of *Soli Deo Gloria* – to God alone be the glory! And Paul wants that to be at the center of our lives as well, the blazing sun in the center of our spiritual universe, around which everything else must orbit in its proper place and proper distance around God.

So let’s join Paul in this text in glorifying and magnifying God for His grace. Let’s sing along and let S.D.G. mark our prayers and praise and lives. In the context of v. 6, there 3 ways we can apply praising God for the glory of His grace, or His “glorious grace.”

1. Praise God for His glorious above-and-beyond grace (v. 3, 6)
2. Praise God for glorious sovereign grace (v. 4)
3. Praise God for glorious adopting grace (v. 5)

Paul doesn't want you just to sit around and discuss these things. He wouldn't want you just to sit there and listen to this sermon. He wants you and me to praise God for the glory of His grace, to not just intellectually apprehend these things, but to emotionally adore God for these things. The first and greatest commandment is not to *believe the right things about the Lord*, it is *love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might / mind*.

Paul doesn't just want our attention, he wants our affections raised. This is not mere information, it's for celebration and praise S.D.G. This is not written only for our enlightenment but for enjoyment. We are here to glorify God *and to enjoy God* forever, starting now.

This passage and message is really a preview of coming attractions – a warm-up for an eternal worship service singing “worthy to the lamb who was slain” for every tribe and tongue, with black and white, brown, and every shade and ethnicity ... all wearing the same washed garments of Christ, with many millions of tongues to sing our great Redeemer's praise.

1. Praise God for His glorious above-and-beyond grace

The verb translated “made us accepted” in v. 6 in the NKJV has a footnote: “Lit. *bestowed grace (favor) upon us*” – it's a rare NT word hard to convey; others have “freely given” or “blessed” or “favored.” I'm calling this “above-and-beyond grace” because this Grk word is for over-the-top grace in the one other place it is used in the NT:

Luke 1:26 (NKJV) *Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God ...²⁷ to a virgin betrothed ... name was Mary.²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, **highly favored one** [same Grk word as Eph. 1:6], the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women! ... for you have found favor with God. (v. 30)*

This highest privilege of any woman history to have Christ in her, this blessing “highly favored,” this above-and-beyond over-the-top out-of-this-world grace, this word is applied to us in Eph. 1:6! The highest message heralded by the highest angel, heralded to us! It is amazing the glories of grace we've already seen in v. 3-6 in the last several weeks, but Paul seems intent to outdo himself here. This is my new favorite truth in Ephesians! The language of the highest favor ever given to a human being is in v. 6 freely bestowed on all who are in Christ. Col. 1:27 says you have “Christ *in you*”! Not in a physical sense as Mary did, but in a spiritual sense, a real sense, Christ is “in you,” Paul taught, and we are v. 6b “in the Beloved.”

Marvelous infinite matchless grace freely bestowed on all who believe!

When we hear of this type of grace to us we must sing with Wesley “And can it be? ... Amazing love how can it be? ... 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God it found out me!” We should say with Mary when she heard this word: “How can these things be?!” God had chosen her of all people to bear His Son, and He's chosen us of all people to be in His Son who had chosen to bear our sin on the cross! Hymn-writers can barely restrain themselves here:

And when I think that God His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin!
Then sings my soul! My Savior God to thee! How Great Thou Art!

v. 3 begins with God: *Blessed be / Praise be to God the Father...*

Tozer: ‘Always and always God must be first. The gospel in its scriptural context puts the glory of God first and the salvation of man second. The angels, approaching from above, chanted "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" This puts the glory of God [first] and the blessing of mankind in their proper order ... God's glory is and must forever remain the Christian's true point of departure. Anything that begins anywhere else, whatever it is, is certainly not New Testament Christianity.’³

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies ...

F. E. Marsh once listed some of God’s blessings for his children:

- An acceptance that can never be questioned. (Ephesians 1:6).
- An inheritance that can never be lost (1 Peter 1:3–5).
- A deliverance that can never be [surpassed] (2 Corinthians 1:10).
- A grace that can never be limited (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- A hope that can never be disappointed. (Hebrews 6:18, 19).
- A bounty that can never be withdrawn. (1 Colossians 3:21–23).
- A joy that need never be diminished (John 15:11).
- A nearness to God that can never be reversed (Ephesians 2:13).
- A peace that can never be disturbed (John 14:27).
- A righteousness that can never be tarnished (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- A salvation that can never be canceled (Hebrews 5:9).⁴

2. Praise God for His glorious sovereign grace (v. 4)

⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.*

In *Chosen for Life: The Case for Election*, Samuel Storms writes on the flow from v. 4-6: ‘the *ultimate* goal is *worship!* That is to say, the preeminent reason why God did not leave all humanity in the just reward of their sin was so that the glory of his grace might be praised. Election was undertaken to establish a platform on which the glory of God’s saving mercy might be seen and magnified and adored and praised ... so that we would all happily and humbly praise “the glory of his grace” or “his glorious grace”!

In what sense does “grace” have “glory”? Or, what makes grace glorious? Jonathan Edwards points to several things. Grace is glorious because of the dignity and excellency of the gift it bestows: salvation in Jesus. Grace is glorious because of the degree of horror from which it delivers us: eternal punishment. Grace is glorious because of the immeasurable *unworthiness* of those on whom it is lavished. And grace is glorious because of the manner by which it was given: through the incarnation, humiliation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus.

The point of all this is that God did not sovereignly choose you so that the *idea* of his choosing you might merely bounce around in your brain. *He chose you for worship, which [he] defines as the proclamation of his excellencies and your extravagantly affectionate and inexpressibly joyful delight in them ... what is of infinite value and beauty, namely God ... how splendid, majestic, and all-sufficient he is ... the beauty of Jesus ... his glory ... [both] understanding and enjoyment ... so that we might experience a new sight, a new taste.*

God's shining of his light into the soul doesn't merely awaken us to the existence ... It shows the excellency and glory and beauty of such things and imparts a new taste for them.

Note Peter's word [in 1 Pet. 2:9 where it says we're *chosen to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you from darkness into his marvelous light*]: It is a "marvelous" light! Why? Because the things discovered by it are themselves marvelous, admirable, precious, and beautiful. And what of our response? ... In true worship we rejoice in who [our glorious God] is, we delight in all that God is for us in Jesus, we relish and revel in and find joyful satisfaction in the endless beauty of what he has done.⁵

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn not in our hymnal called "Glory to God, Whose Sovereign Grace" based on Luke 3:8 where Jesus says God is able to raise up from stones children of Abraham, regenerating hard-hearted spiritually lifeless sinners like Eph. 2:5

Glory to God, whose sovereign grace Has animated senseless stones;
Called us to stand before His face, And raised us into Abraham's sons! ...
You only, Lord, the work have done, And bared Your arm in all our sight;
[You] made the reprobates Your own, And claimed the outcasts as Your right.
Your single arm, almighty Lord, To us the great salvation brought,
Your Word, Your all-creating Word, That spake at first the world from naught.
... O the power of grace divine! In hymns we now our voices raise,
Loudly in strange hosannas join, And blasphemies are turned to praise!⁶

In another of his hymns Wesley wrote:

Clap your hands, ye people all, Praise the God on Whom ye call;
Lift your voice, and shout His praise, Triumph in His sovereign grace!
Shout the God enthroned above, Trumpet forth His conquering love;
Praises to our Jesus sing, Praises to our glorious King!
Wonderful in saving power, Him let all our hearts adore;
Earth and Heav'n repeat the cry, "Glory be to God most High!"

3. Praise God for glorious adopting grace (v. 5)

⁵ *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself*

We've seen this truth in our past messages, but let me just take a minute to review some of the blessings of our spiritual adoption:

- Like the story we began with a few weeks ago, God pre-determined to adopt us (v. 5), He placed His hand upon our heads. - He tells us through the words of Jesus in John 15:18: *I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you.* [He keeps His promise]
- We were orphaned by sin *but God* came into our dark world in the person of Jesus as a substitute orphan, and paid the costly price to bring us home, His own life as a ransom for many orphans.
- We were in a faraway country, as far away from Christ as possible *but God* brought us near by the blood of Christ (2:13)
- God came to our orphanage. We had never seen the light of day and never would have if He hadn't come for us, but God did come.
- God rescued us from our own waste, from a place that was a pit but we didn't know it, where all we knew was stench and darkness, captives to our cribs of sin, in a slum and where we didn't know any better and didn't even want to leave at the time. But God came for us.

- God did not leave us as orphans. He chose us (v. 4), why us out of all the others, Paul doesn't say and I don't know.
- He paid in full to bring us into His household at great cost
- None of us are naturally God's children (2:2-3), we have to be adopted to His family supernaturally by grace thru faith S.D.G.
- He not only lets us call Him "Father," He *is* our Father!
- He doesn't just treat us as sons, He has *made us* His sons, legally, spiritually, permanently, as much as the Only Begotten Son, full joint heirs! *Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus.*
- This heavenly Father loves us and lavishes on us every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, to the praise of glory of grace

And we haven't even seen all of it yet! There's an aspect of it for next week still, redemption from slavery to the son of the king! I again can't improve on Wesley's praise of the glory of His grace:

O how shall I the goodness tell, Father, which You to me have showed?
That I, a child of wrath and hell, I should be called a child of God.

John Piper completes the flow of v. 5-6 this way: 'The goal of your adoption is that the glory of God's grace would be praised. God adopted us in our unworthiness to make his grace look great. You were adopted for the praise of the glory of his grace. God's action in adopting us is radically God-centered and God-exalting. I know that many hear this and think it is not loving. How can God's seeking to exalt himself be loving? The answer is that the glory of God is what we were made to see and enjoy for all eternity. Nothing else will satisfy our souls. Therefore if God does not exalt himself for us to admire and enjoy, then he is unloving. That is, he does not give us what we need.

We are adopted by God [not merely] so that we will rejoice that God made much of us. We are adopted by God so that we will enjoy making much of God's grace as our Father forever. We are adopted so that in this family the Father and the unique elder Son, Jesus Christ, will be the source and focus of all our joy. We are adopted "to the praise of the glory of his grace." It will take an eternity for the glory of that grace to be fully displayed for finite people. Therefore, we will be increasingly happy in God for ever and ever. That is the final meaning of adoption.'⁷

A recent song "Chosen And Adopted" tries to capture it this way:

I have been adopted Yes God has chosen me
To be a part Of His heav'nly family
The Lord God is my Father And I am His own
How happy I will be When Jesus comes to take me home
My adoption was not cheap No it was very dear
Jesus paid with His own life Through Him to our Father I draw near
Jesus is my brother I'm so glad He rose again
And I know because He promised that Co-heir with Him I'll reign
Chorus: It's almost too good to be true I'm a child of the King
Chosen and adopted I cannot help but sing ...⁸

¹ Ian Brown, "Calvin: Flagship in the Fleet," www.sermonaudio.com

² P. Kavanaugh. *The spiritual lives of great composers* (Nashville: Sparrow Press), p. 11.

³ A. W. Tozer, *Born After Midnight*, 23.

⁴ R.J. Morgan. *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 76.

⁵ Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Crossway, 2007), p. 41-43.

⁶ From www.nethymnal.org (pronouns and verbs updated to modern English)

⁷ John Piper, "Predestined For Adoption to the Praise of His Glory, Ephesians 1:1-6," www.desiringgod.org

⁸ Constance Smith, "Chosen and Adopted," 2005, CCLI Song No. 4597999.