

**To God Be the Glory**  
2 Chronicles 5:1-14  
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"I play the notes as they are written but it is God who makes the music." That was the belief of Johann Sebastian Bach, the greatest composer the world has ever seen.

I was reading about Bach this week as I prepared for this, my first sermon in our autumn series *Reformed*, in which we commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Guided by the adage "the church is always reformed, always reforming," we will explore how best to interpret key doctrines of the Reformation for our time and place—our global, postmodern, scientific, and pluralistic age.

An article on Christianity.com described the spirituality of Bach's compositional process:

Whenever he began a new piece, he bowed his head and prayed. "Jesus, help me show your glory through the music I write. May it bring you joy even as it brings joy to your people." . . . When he was finally satisfied, he wrote the letters SDG at the bottom of the page - *Soli Deo Gloria* - For the Glory of God Alone. He hoped that when the music was played, it would point toward God.

In the biblical story from 2 Chronicles, as Solomon dedicates the temple, the people's worship, particularly the music, summons the glory of God, which is physically manifest. The connection between music and glory is ancient and powerful.

As I researched and wrote this week, I listened to a lot of Bach. And indeed, the music is glorious. It does manifest the glory of God.

One of the core doctrines of the Reformation is expressed by this Latin phrase *Soli Deo Gloria* - For the Glory of God Alone.

John Calvin wrote

We cannot open our eyes without being compelled to behold him. . . . Wherever you turn your eyes, there is no portion of the world, however minute, that does not exhibit at least some sparks of beauty; while it is impossible to contemplate the vast and beautiful fabric as it extends around, without being overwhelmed by the immense weight of glory.

I thought of Monday, August 21 and that beautiful day in which most of us experienced the eclipse. What joy you shared in your stories and pictures and Facebook posts. Again and again the words appeared—amazing, beautiful, glorious. Katie Miller, who was on vacation and

saw the eclipse from a hilltop outside Glendo, Wyoming wrote, “Can totally tell why the ancient folk thought something big was going down when it happened.”

Jennifer Forbes-Baily, with her husband and dogs outside Gandy, Nebraska wrote, “When the moon obliterated the sun and day became night, I wished upon the first star that appeared and tears came unbidden – just so incredibly beautiful.”

And my own two year old son, looked up at the total eclipse and pointed and squealed and exclaimed, “The moon.” Even the unschooled mind grasped the sublime.

“We cannot open our eyes without . . . being overwhelmed by the immense weight of glory.”

Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan preacher, proclaimed that the things of God possess a beauty that sets them apart from the things of humankind. “There is a glory that is so high and great, that when clearly seen, commands assent to their divine reality,” he preached.

We were reminded this week of the courage and sacrifice of those first responders who entered the World Trade Center to save their fellow humans. In recent weeks we’ve witnessed the bravery of ordinary people with their canoes and motorboats pulling stranded flood victims from the tops of roofs. Every single week it is my honor to watch congregants care for one other.

“There is a glory that is so high and great, that when clearly seen, commands assent to their divine reality.”

A traditional definition of the doctrine explains:

The Reformation reclaimed the Scriptural teaching of the sovereignty of God over every aspect of the believer's life. All of life is to be lived to the glory of God. . . . In contrast to the monastic division of life into sacred versus secular perpetuated by [the] Roman Church, the reformers saw all of life to be lived under the Lordship of Christ. Every activity of the Christian is to be sanctified unto the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

This idea was most clearly expressed in the opening of the Westminster Catechism of 1646:

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

This week we’ve been caring for Joan Eddy who was in the hospital after a fall. Joan has been a member of this congregation since she was confirmed here in 1943 at the age of twelve. Rarely has she held a major leadership position. A few years ago when she was talked into being president of the Women’s Fellowship, she wasn’t too keen on the idea of being in charge, but she took the role out of a sense of duty and responsibility.

Other than her decades singing the choir, Joan has generally been a behind-the-scenes person. She came to church during the week to work in the choir room, preventing chaos and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fivesolas.com/5solas.htm>

disorder by filing sheet music. Every two weeks she and Verda Werner would spend an entire day preparing the newsletter for mailing and deliver it to the Post Office, always keeping abreast of the changes in bulk mailing. And she showed up for most things, always a faithful, quiet presence.

Reformed doctrine teaches us that Joan's life participates fully in the glory of God.

Of course, as with many Reformation doctrines, this teaching builds upon an ancient teaching of the Christian faith, including the words of St. Irenaeus in the second century, "The glory of God is a humanity fully alive."

What does it mean in the twenty-first century to give glory to God alone? The theologian Bruce Epperly, quoted in our contemporary lesson today, answers this question:

A God of grace and glory moves through every cell and every soul, enlivening, enlightening, and energizing. God's glory is in our salvation—our wholeness and healing—and in the transformation of this good earth so that it might reflect God's aim at beauty, truth, goodness, and justice. We give God glory by following the counsel of Mother Teresa, "to do something beautiful for God."

And so my invitation to you today is to do something beautiful. To enjoy this day that God has made. To eat good food and drink good drink. To laugh with kids and hug your family. To sing and dance. To hike in the woods, kayak the lakes, and let the butterflies frolic around you. To rise and shine and give God the glory, glory.

For we give glory to God by living beautifully and fully and enjoying all that God has created.